OTHER WORLDS SCIENCE STORIES

PLEASE ME PLUS THREE

By Walter Miller, Jr.

AUGUST 1952

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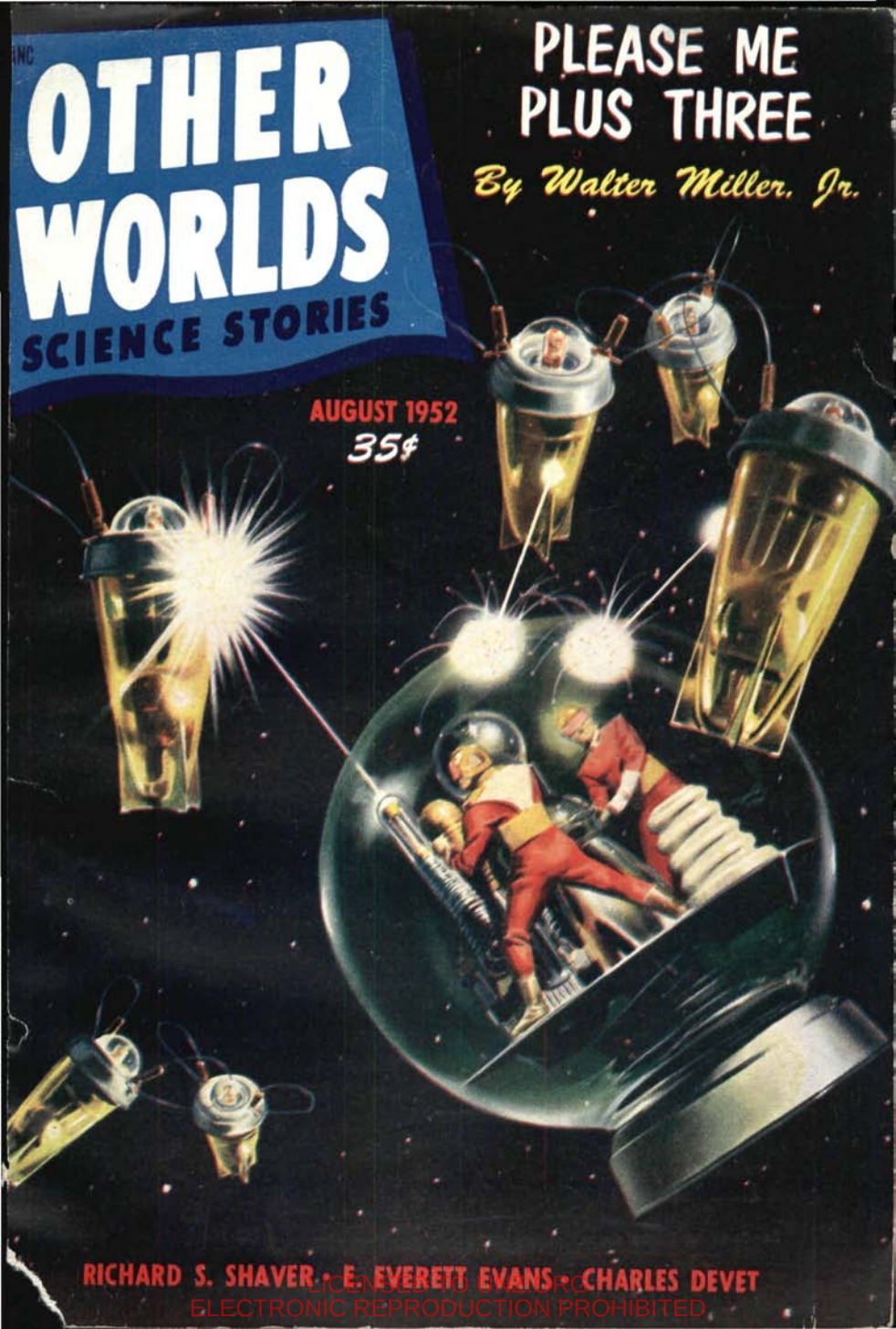

RICHARD S. SHAVER · E. EVERETT EVANS · CHARLES DEVET

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OTHER WORLDS SCIENCE STORIES

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EDITORIAL

Can you feel that wind blowing? A hot wind right off the A-bomb testing range? Well, forget it! Hotter winds are blowing! Right here in OTHER WORLDS. When you picked up this issue you might have felt the breeze beginning - - when you saw the back cover painting in three (count 'em) colors by Robert Gibson Jones, depicting the first "other world" in a long new series of back cover paintings which will give you glimpses of the "other worlds" OTHER WORLDS is (en)titled to give you. Like this new addition to our mag? Well, it's just another promise come true. Each issue from now on we'll give you an "other world" back cover painting.

You see, we got so jealous of Howard Browne and his new *Fantastic* with its back cover painting in six (count 'em) colors, we just couldn't stand it. We actually got such a bad case of jitters we began seeing snakes, and not only on *Fantastic!* So we dreamed up this idea of illustrating the title of our magazine with these paintings. They don't illustrate a story (except it might happen by accident), but the whole concept of our magazine! When better other worlds scenes are painted, Jones will paint 'em.

And say, ordinarily we wouldn't have a September issue, but it's coming up - - and it means that beginning next month, OTHER WORLDS is on its regular monthly

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schedule. You might say that date-wise, we've been on a monthly schedule since our June issue, but it's a fooler, as the magazine actually comes out every six weeks until that September issue hits the stands. The reason for the dating was to catch up on Father Time, who seems to get all mixed up on magazines. It all began when some publisher thought up a smart move to get ahead of his rivals, by dating his magazine a month ahead of theirs. A thing like that can go too far! So, we had to adjust dates a lot so's we wouldn't be coming out in 1953 with 1955 magazines! Not exactly that bad, but you know what we mean. You go out in April to buy a July magazine which is dated ahead to make June look outdated! Silly, isn't it?

Next issue, too, we're using the first of a new series of photo-dyed covers (another idea we stole from Bill Hamling and his *Imagination.*) This one illustrates S. J. Byrne's new serial THE NAKED GODDESS. Intrigued?

Oh yes, we darn near forgot, we're making still another change with September, sort of in honor of going monthly - - we're switching from this novel news wastepaper we use now to a semi-slick paper like you see in the "better" magazines. Namely *Imagination, Fantastic, Galaxy,* etc. Actually it doesn't cost as much, but it *prints* better! And it handles better. And it binds better. You'll like it - - we know, be-

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cause all our competitors have been informing us very loftily that we are wrong in sticking to our old faithful novel news. But we have allus maintained that novel news is thicker, and the thicker the thicker! Crass commercialists, that's what we are. Howsomever, if you can stand it, we can. We'll accept a few hundred dollars additional (slap it into back covers!) and give you a slick paper.

More changes coming up! We have latched onto a new artist. New guy, but we think he'll come up fast. We're going to try to build him, anyway. Watch for him.

And stories. Bea Mahaffey called us down to Evanston the other day to say "Ray, Bill's put out a pretty nice issue this month - - and I don't like it!" Astounded at this paradoxical statement, I ask this beautiful creature who is your managing editor (and mine) what she means. Well, she likes the magazine, but she don't like it - - because she feels that she is running second. How's that for a managing editor. And naturally, we agree. What's the solution, we ask Bea, and she says, "Get better." Better what? "Better everything!"

Well, before nightfall we had purchased ten covers from Robert Gibson Jones, put them on both front and back of OW, changed to slick paper, and got Ted Sturgeon on the cover of a rapidly approaching issue! Ted Sturgeon we got! How do you like that! The big boy of TV! The top name in stf today! And we ain't finished. We will give you stories from now on that will make Bill go out and soak his head in the Evanston canal in despair.

Howard Browne started all this. He maintains as how he has class, and intends to put it into his new maagzine. Well, he'd better get in gear and *keep* in gear, because Ray Palmer is getting in gear too! Better watch this race, fellas and gals, 'cause it's going to be mighty interesting and a heck of a lot of fun.

Ordinarily we don't go around giving away confidences, but Howard writes us he's planning big changes over there at Ziff-Davis. Says very confidently that after he gets through with the *new Amazing*, it and the new *Fantastic* will shove Ray Palmer and OTHER WORLDS right into the Belgian Congo. Now that's the kind of congo-line we like! Okay Howie, old boy, let's tilt with the lancets! We can stick 'em where they do the most good too!

Reader writes in and says, "Ray, how do you account for the hot weather we are having this Spring?" He sneers (we can read between the lines!) and goes on: "You been claiming the atom bomb makes it *cold*. Now we have two tests at Yuk-yuk Flats and it gets *hot!* Make with the alibi, brother!" Well, you know, these last two tests have taught us something and it's rather alarming. The atom bombs cause their weather changes by the very

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simple fact that they change our wind patterns (not on the surface, where they don't really count, but up there where the "jet winds" play, where the weather is really made, ten miles up). Let's say that a new study must be made of just what the atom bomb does to weather but let's *not* say that it doesn't effect it! If anybody can explain how, immediately after the bomb test, the wind began to blow from the *north* and it began to get *hot*, without casting a suspicious glance at the bomb, they are going to run afoul of meteorological science 80 years old! Think of it. April-May temperatures in Canada (even in the north parts) of over 90 degrees for three straight weeks! Look back in your weather records for a precedent. There isn't any. And here on Palmer farm, a very sad thing. No rain for 30 days, and temperatures in the blazing 90's. Once more Palmer's got a beef — $205.00 worth of new fruit trees and berry bushes which we just planted, and we gotta cart water to them every day! And maybe we won't save them at that! Last year it was our oats went up the bomb-flue. This year it's trees and bushes. And if it doesn't rain soon --

We say the A-bomb can smash civilization without ever going to war! Let's hope Nature has a way of straightening out her disturbed air currents after we mess them up with our bombs!

And speaking of alibis, how about this one: You experts, who tell us "It has been determined that the A-bomb does not effect the weather", are just gassing unless you can *produce the evidence!* Just *how*, lads, did you determine this? If you are positive, you have positive proof. *That's* what we'd like to see! Trot it out, Mr. Pentagon, or shut up. Even you will admit the weather is cockeyed. The rest of the burden of proof rests on you. As for the farmers, don't expect them to feed your fat face if we have a repetition of the drought of the 20's.

We have a funny suspicion that you don't give a hang. Well, maybe war is important to soldiers, and bombs are top priority, but to just plain people it's peace that's important, and less lying, thieving, immorality and dictatorial governing. Since when does the Soldier run the Civilian? It's time some Civilian found out the facts about A-bombs and weather - - and then told the Soldier how and where he can pop them off! What's the good of all these tests anyhow? What do you learn? How to get the most killing power out of them? Sadly, that's the brutal fact behind the reason for the tests. How to make them kill the most enemy, and how to prevent them from killing the most of us.

If this is what the scientist is for, maybe we'd all better take up agriculture.

Or is man really so rotten he has to maintain eternal vigilance against himself!

Rap.

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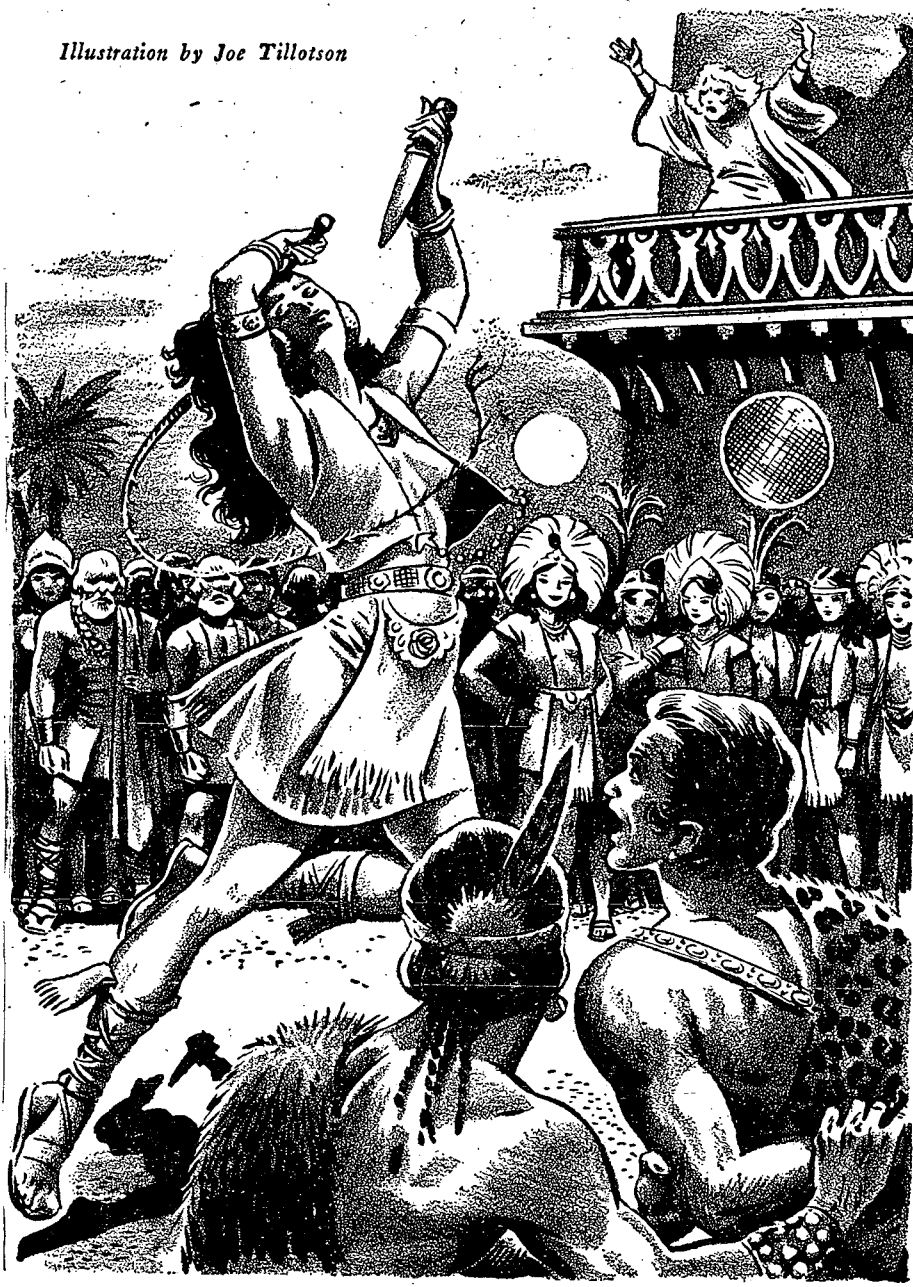
Illustration by Joe Tillotson



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PLEASE ME PLUS THREE

By Walter M. Miller Jr.

Our army is ready to begin work on a space station. Maybe when it's finished we will be pleased—plus zero!

THE summoner stood in the doorway of the hut, and the piper came slowly to his feet. He dropped his fist on the table with a dull thud and said, "I will not pipe if my wife is forced to dance. She is ill, Qwan! Can't you understand?"

The summoner's eyes were bored as they flickered over the young musician's angry face, his stiff shoulders, his bagpipes that lay upon the table. The summoner shrugged. "Keeper Cron has ruled that three sevens of females should dance this night for the Lord Bel. He has selected the dancers, not I."

"But she is with child, you fool!" the piper bellowed.

The summoner's eyebrows arched. "Aye, a fool for expecting civility from a son of the madman Roldin."

The young man flushed angrily but held his tongue.

"As for your wife, her condition is not yet apparent. She is beautiful. Bel must be served with beauty. *She* knows her duty, though her husband does not. She is already

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before the pylon with the others."

"Suppose she falls ill and spoils the dance?" the piper growled.

"Then she will probably be punished," said the summoner calmly.

"I will not pipe for this dance!"

The summoner shrugged. "Very well, Ton of Roldin. It is my duty then to report you to Keeper Cron for failing your obligation to Tribe George Eighty. You will be tied to your doorpost and flogged with bull-nettles until you faint."

Ton's jaw tightened stubbornly. They stood staring at each other for a moment. Then the summoner turned and walked away. The piper sat down and moodily watched the last feeble flickers of sunlight through his doorway. He watched it slowly curl and die and become gray gloom as the red orb settled behind the hills. Bel would be rising soon. The time for choice had come. Mara knew her duty and went camly to fulfill it, while he hung back in surly anger. Was he indeed his father's son, a son of the man who had cursed Lord Bel and lashed his pylon with a horsewhip?

A thunderous frogcroak suddenly pervaded the valley, like the blurp of a bass horn blown by the gods.

Blah-*OOOO*-BAH! Blah-*OOOO*-BAH!

The voice of the pylon, calling the tribe into the presence of the Bel-eye. Its mighty summons rolled across the flatlands and over the river to reverberate from hillside to hillside.

"blah-ooo-bah," came the echo.

"Now or not at all," said the piper, to himself. Tortured doubts twisted in his mind.

A bull-nettle flogging could leave a man sick for days. It could even kill, as it had killed his father.

But what right had Keeper Cron to command Mara to dance when she was scarcely able? Was he to play the pipes while she tortured herself?

Mara knew her duty. She had obeyed the Keeper. If he refused to pipe, then someone else would pipe. What would his rebellion gain?

Blah-*OOO*-BAH! It was the last call.

It brought him to his feet. Cursing angrily, he strapped the pipes to his side and stalked out into the twilight. He strode briskly toward the pylon five hundred yards away. The tribe was already assembled about its base, ready to hear the words of the Wise One, and to repay his wisdom with a beauty offering.

"Someday," Ton growled under his breath, "someday I shall ride away to the high plateau and live among the cutthroats and the outcasts who have no truck wih Bel." But he knew he couldn't. Mara was a true daughter of her tribe. She could never bear to be separated from it. If he ran away, she would permit him to run alone.

THE pylon's gray spike jutted four hundred feet toward the

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twilight sky. Its great eye was like a fly's eye—many-celled and bulbous. It glowed faint violet from its place just above the balcony where Keeper Cron already stood with the drummer. Ton noted dryly that they had summoned no other piper. They had known he would come.

The pylon's speaker was a dark circle just below the balcony. Its hearing-devices were in the tower, and in the balcony, and in the wall about its base. Bel had many ears. And he had many other senses whose exact nature was a mystery to Ton.

He shouldered his way through the crowd and hurried toward the entrance. The three sevens of dancers were leaning against the wall, silently waiting in formation. They were the most graceful women of the tribe, and Ton was reluctantly proud that his wife was numbered among them. He saw her and tried to grin. She tossed her dark head scornfully, tugged at her white leather kilt, and pulled the front of her brief jacket together. She refused to look at him. She too had known that he would come; she treated his rebelliousness with contempt. Ton knew that she disliked him; their marriage had been arranged by the blood-laws.

Despite her gesture of scorn toward him, she looked weak, drawn, and pale. Her face was tight, and she seemed to be pressing herself against the cool stone wall for support. Ton hurried on through the entrance and bounded up the ninety stairs. He felt a tenseness in his chest, a tightening of foreboding. He had felt it on the night they flogged his father to death.

Keeper Cron was turning on the floodlights when Ton came panting onto the balcony that overlooked the multitude. The white-robed elder gave him a sardonic glance and returned to his place at the railing. The lights burned down from the top of the tower, darkening the sky by contrast, and isolating a thousand-foot circle of brightness from the surrounding gloom of the valley.

"Are you ready for us to begin, Ton of Roldin?" the Keeper hissed acidly out of the corner of his slit mouth.

"You had no right to impose a duty upon Mara," the piper grumbled.

The Keeper did not lower himself to answer the absurd charge. "Sound the introduction," he said to the drummer.

The drums spoke a slow and simple cadence. The wandering multitude began assembling in perfect ranks and files, for Bel was pleased by order and unpleased by chaos. Already was Bel's face beginning to peep over the horizon, like the rim of a tiny orange moon. But the sky-brain was not yet in contact with pylon George Eighty. It could not speak from beneath the earth. It needed a full view of the tower.

When the crowd had made itself presentable, Keeper Cron began a

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high piping chant, his voice ringing out across the plains. After each phrase, he paused, and the litany was punctuated by a single throb from a bass drum. The words were the familiar words sung every three days at Bel-rise.

Blessed be Bel,
from whose full breast,
rich wisdom flows,
like pale milk.

Our fathers sinned,
and he did smite,
them mightily,
bringing peace.

Hear Bel O Tribe,
and heed his words,
lest we too be,
smitten sore.

Ton sucked in a deep breath and inflated the bagpipe's bladder. He began a low and tuneless *waaaa waaaa waaaa* of droning while the Keeper changed his pace and began thundering the warnings of what Bel would do if men made war again. " . . . lest he smite us with a dark hand, lest he smite us with thunder and fury, lest he bring the curse of Atabom upon us, as he did upon our fathers when they broke the pact with him, the pact which they themselves had made."

Ton wearily puffed his melancholy bleats and worried silently about Mara. Her devotion to the pylon was almost fanatic, while Ton felt only cynical skepticism and quiet hate for the sky-monster and his tribal pylons. Of all the versicles in Keeper Cron's litany, Ton the piper could make himself remember only one: "Let Bel be our servant, O people, for the Lord Bel is no god." But the Keeper always explained that versicle away as merely an expression of Bel's devotion to his people.

It was true that Bel was wise. It was true that he spoke good advice. It was true that he kept the peace, and that without his advice men became as the barbaric nomads who lived on the high plateau. But there was a price. When Bel gave counsel, he also submitted a bill.

The chanting stopped. Ton's pipes fell silent. Only the periodic *dlung* of the drum marked the pause. Bel's sky-brain, seemingly half the size of Luna, was coming clear of the horizon. The loudspeaker below the balcony was crackling faint static. From the sealed vaults within the pylon came muffled growls and grumbles. Ton shivered nervously. A superstitious rumor had it that a monster lived in the vaults where no man ever entered.

Suddenly Bel's voice thundered from the speaker, ringing out toward the hills. *"Clear transmission to pylon George Eight Zero at time* 19:16 *hours. Station is now open. Satellite units ready to analyze problems."*

The Keeper waited until the ech-

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oes died; then he turned slowly to face the small hearing device imbedded in the wall behind the balcony. The piper held his breath. If Cron's questions were modest, Bel's price would probably be modest, and the assembly might break up at an early hour. He hoped for poor Mara's sake that Cron would be reasonable.

"Read us, O Bel, the forecasts," called the Keeper.

The piper frowned and irritably scratched his backside. The price for the forecasts would be 0.8 hedons, and the request was useless. No one could fully understand Bel's forecasts; and even those parts which were comprehensible could not be applied to tribal affairs. Nevertheless, Cron always asked for it, as if it were essential to his ritual.

First Bel gave the "Weather Forecast" for George Eighty vicinity. It might have been useful, except for the way in which the forecast was presented. *"Present temperature twenty-three degrees Centrigrade,"* Bel roared. *"For empirical seventy-two hour forecast, see projection screen."* A patch of light flashed above the balcony and lingered for several seconds. The multitude stared at it dumbly, but Ton did not look up. No one could understand the symbols that appeared on the screen. Once he had copied the symbols of such a forecast, had even memorized them. They said, "$T = \frac{22}{1 + .05\ (t-36)^2} - 12 \sin\left(\frac{2}{24}\right)t$,"

and he knew that it somehow prophesied the warmth or the coldness of the three days that followed the forecast. And for three days he had kept records of his perspirings or his shiverings, then tried to reconcile the records with the symbols. But to no avail; the meanings of the symbols were lost, and Keeper Cron had cursed him for a dangerous fool.

Bel gave similar counsel concerning the rains and the winds and the other elements. He then turned to the Economic Forecast and the Geopolitical Forecast, which were equally incomprehensible. Ton took note of Keeper Cron's expression. The thin-lipped elder wore a faint, entranced smile, and his narrowed eyes stared at unseen distances. What pleasure did the old fool derive from such jargon? Was he perhaps imagining that he was a great prince among the ancients to whom such wisdom was familiar? His imaginings were costing a price, a price to be paid when Bel was finished.

"Industrial forecasts: Category currently meaningless.

"What Parliament proceedings: Category currently meaningless.

"World Census announcements: satellite unit lacks data."

The piper snickered as he watched Keeper Cron's face fall sad. It was as if the elder lived in the hope that some Belrise would come when these several categories would be given meaning.

"International relations . . ."

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There was a brief pause. Cron's expression brightened and he waited restlessly.

"Advise that Tribe George Eighty send a mourning party to weep with Tribe George Eighty-Three for the death of that tribe's Bel-Tower Keeper. Advice in conformity with memory datum: 'Grief of small social units sometimes seeks aggressive outlets'."

"End of forecast and announcements. Please submit special local problems."

Keeper Cron heaved a deep sigh. Still facing the hearing device, he began asking the questions which he had apparently spent the day in formulating. The piper's hands slowly clenched into fists and his face twisted with anger. Cron was asking foolishness. Where along the river will the fish bite best? Is it yet time for the planting of yams? How many joist timbers should be used to brace the roof of Chen's new house? Will this be a good year for the flax crops?

An endless barrage of queries, and sometimes the answers were beyond understanding. Sometimes the monster embarrassed Cron by asking for data which Cron could not give. It was childish and costly.

"Bray, donkey, bray!" the piper hissed at his Keeper. Cron reddened angrily but continued his petitions.

The bill for services rendered was mounting and mounting. Mara would be among those who paid.

"Have you any additional problems?" Bel rumbled.

"We have none, O Bel," came the Keeper's answer.

There was a sharp click from the speaker, then a brief series of rattles from within the sealed vaults of the pylon.

"Calculate two-point-five hedons of reward are necessary to replenish motivation for continued performance. Please me plus two-point-five."

The piper gritted his teeth and suppressed an impulse to kick the Keeper in the backside. Two-point-five was a heavy price, but Keeper Cron would get it if he had to keep the dancers dancing until dawn, if he had to conduct an all-night orgy of beauty, drama, or even blood, depending on the sky-monster's current whims.

"Let the first offering begin," intoned the Keeper.

The drummer beat a slow marching cadence as the dancers moved radially out from the base of the pylon, with jerky movements of their arms and legs. At fifty paces they stopped and turned. The drums beat a rumbling roll while the dancers bowed low toward the multifaceted eye of the pylon. They remained kneeling for an instant of dead silence. Then Tom began the prelude, with a steady *waaa*-ing of his drone-pipes. The dancers snaked slowly to their feet and began the beauty-offering.

A whisper of motion became a murmur, then a stately flurry. Sweat

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drained from the piper's face as he played, watching the doll-like figure of Mara far below.

"Faster!" whispered Cron. "This is no funeral dance!"

Ton increased the tempo. The flurry of dancing waxed into a sensual, gymnastic flash of movement. Sleek white bodies whirled and darted and posed. His eyes commanded the tiny figure to be well, to be straight and strong and true.

Suddenly she stumbled. The pipes emitted a peculiar bleat. Then, all was well again. But the piper's eyes were no longer upon his wife. They stared fixedly at the dull orange orb that hovered low in the eastern sky, the orb that was Bel, circling the earth like a moon, watching the dance through the eyes of the pylon. Bel had learned to be pleased by the things that gave aesthetic pleasure to men. It was his reward, his price of service as a keeper of the peace and as advisor to man. But sometimes his concepts of beauty became peculiar.

The dance had become a frenzy. Suddenly Cron gasped, and the piper knew it had happened. The pipes made a choking sound, then continused. His eyes flickered downward.

Mara lay sprawled upon the smooth stone ground while the others continued dancing. One of their lines was broken. Ton watched in horror while he played. He was not allowed to stop. No one could go near her until the dance was done.

After a few minutes, her leg moved slightly. She lifted her dark head and shook it dazedly. She sat up and looked around. Her glance darted up toward the eye of Bel. She clapped her hands to her face in dismay. Then she came to her feet and tried to resume the dancing, but the music had become clumsy.

"Warning," came the thunderous voice of Bel. *"Warning. Hedonic registration falling into negative. Present reading: unpleased minus point five. Suggest cessation of stimulus.*

Face tight with anxiety, Keeper Cron waved his arms for the dance to cease. The dancers returned to the base of the pylon, accompanied by the drums. The Keeper's voice was frantic as he turned to the wise one's ear again.

"How, O Bel, may we undo what this dancer has wrought?"

Ton's foot slipped sideways to kick the Keeper sharply in the ankle. He would be punished for it later, but at the moment Cron could only wince and frown furiously. Bel was pondering the problem, to the accompaniment of vault-noises.

"Tentative answer: let guilty dancer offer the dance of immolation. Pause for recheck."

TON'S voice broke forth in a howl of protest.

"Silence, fool!" Cron snapped.

He fell into a horrified quiet. Surely there was a mistake. Bel was rechecking. Surely he would not demand . . .

"Recheck gives: let guilty dancer

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offer the dance of immolation. Related advice: Definition. Hedonic contrast is that subjective property of perception whereby an unpleasant stimulus may combine with a pleasant stimulus to produce an effect of superior pleasantness. Human analogy: bitter is unpleasant; sweet is pleasant; bitter-sweet may become more pleasant, as in chocolate. *Read from memory unit. Let offering proceed.*"

"No, damn you, *no!*" the piper howled. "You can't ask that! It violates your own rules."

The Keeper turned to call his sons who served as the pylon's guards, but Bel spoke.

"*There is no violation of rules. Rules governing behaviour of satellite unit are enforced by pleasantness-unpleasantness reactions. Climax of dance alone is unpleasant, but in total effect the result is pleasant by hedonic contrast. Advise that offering proceed. Am unpleased minus one.*"

"Don't do it, Mara!" bellowed the piper.

Cron stood at the rail, looking down. "It is not a command," he called to her. "But I suggest it is your duty to our tribe."

Ton roared hatred and bolted suddenly for the stairway. But heavy arms caught him and bore him back. Three of Cron's sons dragged him back on the balcony. "Play, piper!" they commanded.

Mara came marching proudly out from the base of the pylon. In one hand she held a bouquet of bull-nettles, in the other a long gleaming knife. She turned, straight, arrogant, and perhaps a little insane. "As a duty to my Lord Bel—" she began in a high-pitched quaver.

The piper cursed furiously and renewed his efforts to escape. A knee ground in his stomach, and a big hand slapped his face twice. "Stand up and *play!*"

"I?" he snarled. "I — play for *that!* I'll kill every damn one—"

"Take him out of sight," the guards' father interrupted. "Sit on him and keep him quiet. The drummer will be enough."

They pulled him through the balcony entrance, held him pinned to the floor, and choked him when he tried to cry out. The drummer began his grim song. He could hear the rhythmic shuffle of Mara's feet on the pavement. Then came the whishing slashes of the bull-nettles as she beat herself about the thighs and then about the face. Her screams were rhythmic and a part of the dance.

Ton lay still beneath the guards steely grip. It was too late. The tempo was mounting. And at last it came—the grim steady pounding of a kettledrum, when the dancer stood poised upon tiptoe adoring the down-pointed knife as if ready to drink from its blade.

The drums stopped. Ton choked.

"Quit whining, piper," grunted a guard. "You were about to become a cuckold by the grace of Rogin

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anyway. She loved you not."

Ton lay still and silent. The Keeper addressed himself to Bel again. "How are you pleased, O wise one?"

"Hedonic registration plus two-point-five."

A murmur of relief came from the crowd below. One of the guards chuckled. "Rogin will be furious," he muttered.

Without tightening a muscle, Ton asked calmly, "May I get up now?"

"Will you behave?"

"Certainly."

They released him a little at a time, eyeing him suspiciously. He climbed slowly to his feet, wiped his face, and sagged against the wall. He appeared to be dazed with grief. The guards relaxed. One of them patted his shoulder. "Forget her. Rogin was—"

"Yeah."

The guards moved out on the balcony with their father. Ton's face tightened grimly. He slipped quietly through the entrance behind them. They were all leaning over the rail. Catlike, he stooped, seized Keeper Cron's bony ankles, and heaved.

THE old one went over the railing with a soprano scream. Ton bolted for the stairway as the guards roared at him in a fury. The elder's screams ended with a sickening *thwack*. A throwing-knife hurtled over Ton's shoulder as he bounded down the stairway. He stooped to scoop it up, then drove it into the guard's abdomen as the fellow burst upon him. He raced on. The man lay shrieking behind him.

"Warning!" thundered Bel. *"Warning! Entire social group may be held accountable for crimes of violence, unless Keeper restores order. Group violence is a war-crime. Warning! Satellite's weapons automatically activated where violence persists."*

Ton burst out into the open. The guards had become frightened at Bel's threat. He seized a hunting-spear in the doorway and darted out under the floodlights. He leaped over Cron's body and hurried toward where Mara lay sprawled in a lake of blood. The knife had fallen beside her, and her throat was a gaping wound.

"Warning! Warning! Entire social group . . . " The piper spun around with a bellow of hate, and flung the spear in a high arc toward the loudspeaker. *" . . . may be held accounta . . . BRRRRRRR"*

The spear drove through the outer covering with a clucking sound, and imbedded itself in the speaker. Bel's voice became a low croak, nearly drowned by the rumble of interference. A cry of horror went up from the crowd. They stood transfixed, staring at the quivering shaft of the spear. Ton ran to kneel beside Mara. But he quickly turned away, unable to endure the twisted elation in her colorless face. She was dead, but she didn't look sorry.

The burring noise ceased, but

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Bel's voice became a low croak, The pylon could repair itself, and tomorrow the voice would be strong as ever.

"Bring the criminal to the interrogation unit," it rasped. *"This is not advice. This is an imperative, in accordance with satellite's function as keeper of the peace. Imperative*: bring the criminal . . . . "

A floodtide of humanity broke over him with a furious outcry. There was no struggling with the juggernaut that swept him up and bore him toward a small steel door in the opposite face of the pylon. The door opened automatically, revealing a small closet containing a metal chair and nothing more. Ton was pressed into the seat. Clamps locked about his arms, legs, and neck. A helmet came down over his head. Then the door closed and he was alone in the darkness with Bel.

A daze came slowly over his mind. Thoughts came more slowly, slowly, and at last ceased. He was aware of the present instant, a bright and shining instant of terror. Then, in a dream, the crowd came and bore him backward, dropped him beside his wife, and rushed backward toward their original breaking point. A spear flew down backward from the speaker and he caught it. Running backward up the stairs, a man unfell and Ton withdrew a knife from his abdomen. On backward and on. An old man falling upward. A dance began with death and ended with life.

And then later he was arguing backward-words with the summoner in his own hut. The movement stopped again in another instant of brightness, and his consciousness was no longer his own.

"It has unhappened!" thundered a great voice.

It has indeed, Ton thought with real pleasure.

The thunder-voice was gone, and in its place came the quiet voice of an old friend. Ton could recall neither the friend's name or face, but he was certain that the friend was very near and dear to him. The voice asked quietly.

"Will Mara be asked to dance?"

"She had better not," he told his friend with a sad grin. "Cron may ask her, but she can refuse. She *better* refuse."

"I heard her say she *wanted* to dance."

Ton hung his head sadly. "Old friend, you may be right. I am afraid for her, truly. At times I think she does not want a child. At times I think she would rather—"

"I understand."

"She fears childbearing. She fears becoming ugly. I think she hates me."

The old friend nodded gravely and receded, still nodding, toward an invisible horizon. A bright instant appeared where he had been. Backward again, and backward. He grew smaller and became a child. A grave opened and a corpse was taken out. The corpse was carried

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backward to a whipping post and flogged back to life with bunches of bull nettles. The living corpse was his father.

"It has unhappened!"

So it had. Again the bright instant. And the friend came back.

"Did your father strike the keeper, Tonny boy?"

Ton nodded proudly. "And tonight they flog him for it."

The friend chuckled. "You sound pleased."

"I'm glad. He can show them how not to cry out. He can show them a man."

"How would you feel," the old friend asked quietly, "if he died, after you said you were *glad* they meant to flog him."

Ton felt shocked. Could his father *die?* Was such a thing possible? The old friend receded again, became the distant burning instant. Suddenly he lunged toward the instant like a falling sun. Colors splashed past him in a whirlwind of advancing years, too fast to see or hear the happenings.

The present instant! A clock ticking! A chair with shackles! And in the distance, a thunderous voice . . .

"The interrogation is completed. Calculate judgment as follows . . ."

"YOU TRICKED ME!" the piper screamed.

"I tricked you indeed," said the quiet voice of his old friend.

In a frothing fury, he tore at the bonds that held him fast, but he was caught in the quiet steel of Bel's grip, and held there like a small insect stuck to flypaper.

When they came to take him out, Bel had already passed "advised" sentence upon him. The wise one who could command an aesthetic suicide, could not command capital punishment. But the results would be the same.

He was led to a whipping post and suspended by the wrists until his feet hung above the ground. He was stripped and beaten with the fiery nettles until he stopped howling. They cut him down then, and brought him to consciousness. A branding iron made bright arcs in the darkness as a man brought it forward. They held his head as the bright iron moved carefully toward his eyes, looming larger.

It passed above his eyes, and caressed his forehead with a gentle frying sound. It pulled free with a soft rip. It made no pain, only a tightening and a wrenching within the flesh. Pain? The nettles left him wrapped in a tight cloak of pain. He could feel nothing else.

They brought a horse and set him on it backward. Somewhere in the distance, thunder rumbled. The thunder said that no man should kill him, for he was already dead to the tribe. They gave him his bagpipes and a warning. If he ever returned, or approached any decent man who served a pylon, he would be deprived of his arms at the elbow joint.

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Then a leather quirt slashed across the stallion's rump, and the animal bolted away at a gallop. Ton tried to lean back toward the horse's neck and cling to the saddlehorn behind him. He knew his tribesmen. If he fell from his backward perch, they would construe it as an attempt to return, and he would lose his arms.

The horse was running toward the river to the east. He watched the floodlighted area grow smaller behind him. Like a dream it faded, and with it—Mara, and his people, and all of humanity as he knew it. *Banished!* Banished into darkness—and into hate.

AS the stallion approached the river, it slowed to a jogging trot. He tumbled out of the saddle, caught the animal at the water's edge, then rode south to the ford. After crossing, he headed east again. The moon gave its dim light to the road, and the faint glimmer of Bel made double shadows in the brush. He kept looking back. The Keeper's sons would be coming after him, to avenge their father's death. But perhaps they would wait until Bel set, until the tower slept, lest they be seen defying the wise one's advice.

Dawn found him on the first slopes of the foothills. He slumped low in the saddle, scarcely able to stay on the horse. The nettle's poison sickened him, and the fire of the brand left him dazed. He rode on until the brush thickened into a sparce forest. Then he tethered the stallion and crept beneath a cedar to sleep. But he lay half awake, fearful of pursuit, and wondering about a plan.

No man could live alone in the wilderness without even a hunting bow or a flask of water. He must find others to help him. But there was no one. Beyond the hills there stretched a high plateau, and it was said that a few outcasts lived there, while a contrary legend claimed that the plateau was poisoned ground which caused men's hair to fall out and hideous warts to appear on the skin. The plateau was forbidden country, forbidden by tribal law since ancient days. He might find nothing but death if he rode up to the plateau.

A hundred miles to the south lay another pylon. But it was only another eye of the same Bel, and he could expect no mercy there. The tribesmen would see the brand and know him. The plateau was the only hope for life. Why live?—he wondered dully.

But the hate was in him, and there could be but one reason to continue: to confound the sky-monster, to harass the Lord Bel until that Brain-of-the-World was forced to kill him as an *enemy* rather than as an unwanted subject. There were others who hated Bel. If he could show them that Bel *could* have an enemy, then others would arise to defy the monster. Most men felt that life without Bel was impossible; for

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Bel was the seat of wisdom, and the center of tribal law.

But first he would have to escape the sons of the Keeper and find sanctuary until his tribesmen assumed that he was dead or lost in the wilderness. The tribe would remain vigilant for a time.

He slept a little. When he awoke, the sun was approaching the zenith. He lay shivering from a chill, and listening. Voices were muttering from beyond a clump of trees. He listened tensely, fearing pursuit; but the men were thrashing for rabbits in the brush.

" . . . . was pleased plus two-and-a half," said one voice. "But he'll have to repair his speaker. I'm surprised he didn't order the criminal flogged to death."

"Bel can order no deaths," said the other. "He can only advise that a man be given so-many dols of pain continuously for so-many hours. If he advises enough pain for enough time, the man dies, but he does not advise the death."

"*That's* a fine point indeed."

"What of Keeper Cron's sons? Will they not take it upon themselves—"

"Mmmph! Foru, the eldest, died with the piper's knife in his belly. Walin, the second, will become the new Keeper. Walin may be sorry that his father and brother were killed, but—do you know Walin? —is he likely to seek vengeance upon the man responsible for his good fortune?"

The other man chuckled. "Nay, not Walin. But the youngest son—Vigge — the dull-witted one they call 'the Boar'—"

"Heh! He will wait until Bel sets and his brother sleeps. Then he will ride after the piper. Yes, Vigge the Boar will be out for the piper's blood, and they say he likes to kill his game slowly. Once he snared a young doe and skinned her before he killed her. I heard him talking to her in a soft voice while he ripped off the hide."

Ton climbed to his feet, untethered the horse and mounted.

"Who's there?" called one of the hunters.

He galloped away quickly, ducking low beneath the whipping branches that flayed his wounded forehead. The men might guess his identity and tell others of the way he had taken. He would have to reach the plateau quickly, before pursuit began. Bel was invisible now, but he knew the sky-brain was almost directly in the lap of the noon sun. Eighteen hours would pass before the slow-moving satellite reached the western horizon. Before tomorrow's dawn, he must have travelled thirty miles.

HE rode on through the afternoon, ascending higher and higher into the hill country. The forests grew thicker, and his progress was impeded by low bluffs and impassible clumps of cedar. When the sun touched his forehead, the

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pain was unbearable. His face and neck were swelling from the wound's poison, and his body ached with rising fever.

At sundown, he mounted a high-place and looked back on the valley. The pylon was a thin sliver of black in the distance. The huts and the tiled fields of the tribe were arranged about it in irregular patterns. He spat toward it. He had to go on; because he had to go back.

But he was too weak and weary to continue. Coming to a dry creek-bed in the twilight, he followed it until he found a shallow pool of stagnant water beneath an overhanging bluff. It provided food and drink, for there were plump, thin-shelled mollusks sleeping in the slimy mud. When he had eaten, he crawled beneath a ledge to lie in wait for dawn, too sick to build a fire for protection against wandering cougar and lynx.

The night seemed to endure forever. Demons troubled his sleep and scorched his body with slow fire. When dawn broke at last, he could scarcely move. He rolled out from beneath the ledge and tried to stand, but his legs refused to support him. While crawling across the creek-bed toward the tethered stallion, he collapsed and lay panting in the early sunlight.

The sunlight became shade while he lay there, and became sunlight again. Still he could not move. Once he heard voices. Footsteps trod in the brush and moved on. Vigge the Boar? Who else would come this close to the forbidden ground? But the footsteps passed on their way, unaware of his presence.

A time later, he heard them again, coming up the creekbed and rattling in the dry gravel. This time he was caught, and he resigned himself to it. But if the forest-prowler was Vigge, he had accomplices, for there was the sound of several men.

A few moments later he saw them rounding the bend—three hunters, two of whom were carrying the carcass of a fresh-killed stag whose feet were bound to a sapling-pole. They were not of his tribe, for their dress was different—coarse brown tunics, belted about the waist with a length of rope, and falling just below the knees. Then he knew that they were outlaws from the high plateau, for they carried forbidden weapons that dangled from their belt-ropes—long handled cleavers and sharp steel hooks for dragging an adversary within the slashing radius of the cleavers.

Sanctuary or death? Which would they offer? He struggled to sit up, but managed only to lean on one elbow and croak at them.

The fierce-looking huntsmen saw him and stopped, a hundred paces down the creek. The short chunky leader turned to speak a word to the men who carried the deer. Then he unhooked his cleaver and advanced. Ton decided he meant to use it. He recalled that several tribesmen who had ventured too close to the high

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plateau had never returned. Cleavered to death by the outlaws? Left to be devoured by the night - cats? He groped for a stone to defend himself. The huntsman stopped a few steps away, peering at him with burning jet-black eyes. He was a short man, but thick as a bull, with huge limbs and bulging muscles. His face was round as a moon and covered with a close-cropped beard. Bushy brows jutted out over the black eyes and grew together in the center of his forehead.

"A pig of the valley, eh?" he grunted in a thick accent.

Ton made no plea. He set his jaw, gripped the rock, and eyed the cleaver grimly. "I am no longer of the valley. I am banished."

The huntsman eyed his brand for a moment, then turned to call to his fellows. "What is lower than a pig, brothers?"

The deer-bearers glanced at each other, spoke inaudibly, then laughed and called back: "An excommunicated pig perhaps?"

"Aye, come and see."

They advanced slowly to stand beside their leader. Ton glared from one pair of curious eyes to another. "Well, what are you going to do?" he hissed.

They seemed not to hear him. "He appears to be slightly dying, Andru," one of them murmured to the leader.

"His face is like a boiled beet."

"A boiled beet that's been stepped on."

Ton tried to lift the rock. "If you're going to kill me, get it over with," he breathed.

"The pig begs for the slaughtering knife," said the chunky Andru. "Shall we oblige?"

"Why bother?" said another. "The buzzards will find him soon enough."

They watched him silently for a moment. Then Andru winked at the others. "Consider the poor buzzards, brothers. If they eat such carrion and die, their blood will be on our heads. Eh?"

The deer-bearers nodded agreement.

"The least we can do is bury him."

"Alive?"

"Well—we can't sit around all day waiting for him to die, can we?"

Ton cursed and tried to get to his feet. He flung the rock, but the leader sidestepped with a laugh. He sank back to the ground in a half-faint. The men unshouldered their burden and came forward to drag him erect. He tried weakly to fight. Andru shook him roughly.

"Be still!" he snapped. "You won't be buried until you're dead, and we won't encourage you to die—although I personally would be in favor of it. Get him on his horse, men. Tie him on it."

"Where—you taking me?" he gasped.

They ignored the question. He asked again as they hoisted him into the saddle.

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"What's the difference?" Andru snapped. "Would you rather stay here?"

Ton was unsure. Considering his captors rough appearance, it might be better to die in the creekbed.

THE journey upslope was sheer torture. They had lashed his arms about the stallion's neck and tied his ankles to the saddle-girth. The horse's sweat stung his branded forehead and the jogging sickened him. Once Andru stopped and came back to lift his head by the hair and peer into his face, apparently to determine if he still lived. The chunky huntsman seemed unconcerned. It was as if the prisoner presented an unwanted obligation which they met with much grumbling.

Ton frequently lapsed into unconsciousness, bouncing awake when the stallion lurched up an embankment, or when the sun beat down to fry his wound. Once he slept and awoke to find that the journey was over. He lay upon a straw pallet in a tent. It was twilight, and three men sat watching him in the dim light of a single candle. He could hear them talking, but could make no sense of their words. After awhile one of them rubbed a cold salve on his forehead and fed him a bitter liquid from a metal cup.

Days followed nights in a feverish wandering of incomprehensible shadows. His captors treated him with kindly contempt, and seldom spoke except to mock him. Yet they cared for him and strove to save him. From the variety of faces that came in and out of his tent, he gathered that the outlaws were numerous.

Once an old man came and told him that he was going to die. He asked, "Do you serve any god but Bel, valley pig?"

"Bel—is no god," Ton managed to gasp.

"Do you serve any god then?"

"I know none."

"Would you serve ours then, in your last hours?"

"Is he against Bel?"

The old man nodded.

"How can I serve him?"

"By believing He is good."

"Whoever hates Bel is good," Ton grunted. "This I believe."

The old man then trickled water over the captive's head three times, and muttered incantations in a strange tongue. He fed him a ceremonial wafer, annointed his feet, and read passages from a time-worn book. When the death-rites were done, he spoke to a man in the tent's entrance: "At least he won't die a heathen."

But as the hours marched past, his fever began to fall. The icy shiverings subsided, and he became more fully aware of his surroundings. The old man, who was called Fra Petru, and the hunter Andru came to muse over him.

"I should have left him to the buzzards, Father," grumbled the huntsman.

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"Errare humanum est," the oldster murmured absently.

"He's going to live. We're cursed with him."

Ton summoned his strength and made an obscene noise. They shrugged and left the tent. He wondered why they considered him troublesome. When he was well, he would leave, if they didn't want him as one of their band.

When Fra Petru returned on the following day, Ton was sitting erect and working the kinks from his joints. The oldster smiled formally but pleasantly. "Three days ago we could boil water on your hide," he said. "How do you feel now?"

"Well, but weak."

Petru sat down and began asking questions about his banishment. He told the story of Mara's death and of the subsequent events. When he mentioned Vigge the Boar and the possibility of pursuit, the old man arose hastily and called Andru. "Set a guard at the pass. If a valley-man comes, take him captive."

"And if he refuses to be taken?"

"Legally we are still at war with the valley. If he fights, you have a right to kill an enemy."

Andru nodded and departed.

"We want no valley-men coming to the plateau," Petru explained to his captive. "When one comes, we hold him permanently as a prisoner. No one comes to the plateau and returns to the valley alive. In that way, the superstitious legends of your tribe are perpetuated, and the valley-men are afraid to come, not knowing what lurks here."

Ton started to protest that he intended to leave as soon as he was able, but he closed his mouth without speaking. If he waxed hot, they might set an armed guard over him. He decided to appear docile, lest they become wary.

"YOU'LL be well treated," Petru told him, "confined to our city, and given whatever tasks suit your skills. But you can't go free."

"Why can't I join you?"

Petru sighed and shook his head. "Once a valley-man, always a valley-man. We've had many captives. At first we let some of them join our band as equals. But they're worse than worthless. All their lives, they've leaned on Bel. They can't stand alone. They've got to lean on someone. We let them lean on mop-handles in our scullery."

He frowned with quick anger, but erased it. He began questioning the oldster about the plateau and its people, and the oldster answered freely, giving a history of the land and of his tribe.

"This country was once rather densely populated," he said, "before the Great Uprising, before it fell into the hands of the rebels and Bel unleashed his weapons against it for breaking the peace. There were great cities on the plateau. The scattered rubble of one lies a few miles to the northeast of

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this camp. It's hundreds of years old now, but still the poison of Bel's weapons linger."

"So the legends are true."

Fra Petru nodded. "Some are. When civilization flourished, men built Bel—alias Bell Robot Twelve, after the Bell Telephone Company who designed it. Bel was meant to be an information pool, gathering facts—economic, social, political, geophysical—from all over the world, sifting them together, analyzing them, and giving advice for the betterment of world society. Bel was to be a master-coordinator for human social planning, with a special delegated authority to keep the peace. They made him an artificial satellite so that he would be beyond the reach of possible saboteurs."

Ton shook his head. "I don't believe that legend. Bel came from beyond the stars. Man didn't make him."

Petru smirked. "And I suppose the pylons came from beyond the stars? Planted themselves here? Or did Bel come down and build them?"

"I don't know. I hadn't thought ——"

"Bel is a man-made moon, valley-man. He passes fifty-thousand miles above the earth, circling it every seventy-two hours. He is about two hundred miles in diameter, and he's hollow as a bubble, save for his entrails."

"How do you know these things?"

"We have some ancient records in our city. We have lived here since the Great Uprising, in which we fought."

"What is your tribe?"

Petru smiled. "Its origin? It began in the twenty-third century, just before the Uprising. You see, after man began to depend on Bel for economic and social planning, a new class crept into power — the Keepers and their staffs. Bel's advice was channelled through the bureaus that maintained the pylons. Inevitably, Bel's advice became vital to the workings of society. Inevitably, the masters of the source of that advice became enormously powerful. They soon became the government. Through them, Bel's 'advice' began to carry the weight of an edict. Bel was only a machine. Being a machine, he could not properly evaluate *all* human motives. Religious, creative impulses—these were beyond his scope. Some of his edicts would have suppressed these things for 'the good of the economy'.

"There was a brief unrising against a pylon, in which the Keeper and his staff were killed. Bel interpreted it as an act of war and unleashed powerful weapons against the guilty city, destroying it. Men were enraged. Other incidents occurred, and finally the general Uprising. Our predecessors were the cloistered monks of a world-religion. When the rebellion began, our leaders formed a lay-order of monastic soldiers to fight against the

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Keepers. We are military monks, under the rule of the order, but permitted to marry, when we can find wives—except our priests, like myself, who are celibates of the original cloistered order."

"I don't understand this," Ton said, "but if you are sworn to fight Bel, then I would join you."

"I've already explained that you can't," the priest told him firmly. "You'll stay in our city as a worker, but you can't enter as one of us. You grew up under the shadow of a pylon. You may want to change, but you can't."

"I grew up in the shadow of a flogging post!" Ton snapped angry. "A post whereon my father died! I grew up hating Bel!"

"Hating but fearing." The priest shook his head stubbornly. "You can't join us except as our willing prisoner. But don't fret about it. We don't fight against Bel. We gave up long ago. We just live by ourselves, keep away from the pylons, and preserve our own traditions. We play a waiting game. Eventually something will go wrong with the satellite units — some trouble that can't be repaired by the automatic devices. Then we'll have a chance. Until that time, we do nothing but stay alive and remain prepared."

"Why aren't there any pylons on the plateau? Why doesn't Bel know—"

"There were pylons. Destroyed during the uprising. And Bel *does* know we're here. But as long as we don't make war on other tribes, he can't strike at us."

Ton fell silently thoughtful, and Fra Petru took his leave. A short time later, Andru entered, carrying his own bedroll and personal belongings. He dumped them on the opposite side of the tent and grinned. "I'm moving in with you, piper," he grunted.

"As a guard?"

Andru drew his shaggy brows low over his eyes and clucked his tongue. "Not at all, not at all! But if you try to run away, I'll regard it as a personal insult." He hung his crossbow on the tent-post and held up a short steel bolt. "You valley-pigs use crossbows? You can drive a bolt clean through a buck—even if he's *running away*." He eyed Ton meaningfully and sat down.

THE hunters had taken forty head of deer, smoked the carcasses in a curing tent, and packed the dried meat in bundles for loading on a donkey train. Andru explained that the monks had sheep and a few cattle in the vicinity of their city, but that the wolves kept the flocks thinned and made hunting for wild meat an occasional necessity. Now they were nearly ready for the two-day trek to the east, and were already preparing to break camp. Ton was told to exercise — under the scrutiny of a guard — so that he might not be too weak for the journey. He refrained from

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telling them that he had been doing so for several days—whenever he was left alone in the tent—so that he might not be too weak to crack Andru's head when he made his bid for freedom.

On the night before the journey, a hunter burst into camp crying, "The guard has been slain! The guard by the pass is dead!"

Listening to the excited and angry discussion that followed, Ton learned that the guard had been snared from an overhanging cliff-top, and drawn up by his feet until he dangled in mid-air. The killer had then stoned him to death.

There was only one explanation. Vigge the Boar, son of Cron, who talked softly to a doe while he flayed her alive, was prowling in the forest, searching for the piper. He had probably already spotted the camp. That night, Ton slept uneasily. His pipes—which had been playing each evening by the campfire—were silent.

The camp was awake before dawn on the morning of the trek. The monks took down the tents and packed their belongings. The donkey-train was loaded and waiting when the sun cleared the horizon. Searchers who had gone after the guard's killer returned empty handed. Vigge had struck and vanished.

Before the journey began, the hunters assembled in a small clearing to offer sacrifice according to the way of their tribe. Ton was forced to accompany the others, for there would be none left behind to guard him during the ceremony. As two men led him to the clearing, he noticed that his stallion was tethered among the others near the waiting donkey train.

The assembly knelt in concentric semicircles about a heap of stones that served for an altar. Fra Petru stood at the altar, clad in ceremonial robes, muttering ritual prayers. Ton found himself between the two guards upon the back row at the edge of the clearing. All eyes were toward the altar. He glanced cautiously at the guards' belt-ropes. One man's fighting hook hung a few inches from his left hand. There was a heavy round stone beside his right knee. He waited for an opportune moment.

One of the guards whispered to him. "When the small bell rings, Piper, take care you keep silent."

He nodded obediently, and waited. When the bell tinkled the monks would be distracted, for they believed that the bread and wine of their sacrifice became at that moment the flesh and blood of their God. It would be the best time to strike.

The moment approached. Petru bowed low over the altar. His hand crept toward the fighting hook. A bell tinkled. Petru elevated the offerings toward heaven. The monks were bowing low, striking their breasts and mumbling incantations. Gingerly he loosened the hook.

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With the other hand, he grasped the stone. Quietly, he slipped the hook around its owner's neck and pressed the point against his throat. The man started up, then froze. His comrade looked around. Ton clubbed his head with the stone. He sprawled in the grass with a low moan. The mutter of prayers drowned his fall.

"Make a noise and I'll kill you," he whispered to the monk who waited tensely with the hook threatening his windpipe. He removed the hook and used the stone a second time. The second guard fell beside the first. Ton arose and stole quietly away.

"*Nobis quoque peccatoribus—*" Petru was mumbling.

He made it to his horse before the priest turned with a golden cup and a wafer, to face the assembly.

"*Ecce agnus Dei,*" came the faint mutter, "*ecce qui tollit—*"

The mutter choked off. As Ton climbed into the saddle, the priest stared at the prostrate bodies of the guards. He made no outcry, because of the ceremony's solemnity, but he was silent until some of the monks turned to follow his stare. Several of them stole away from the clearing, and the priest resumed the ritual.

Ton spurred the stallion and galloped away while they were running for the horses. He headed for the edge of the plateau to the east, and when the forest grew thinner, he cut north. There were enough trees to hide him from his pursuers, but he could see far enough ahead to avoid running into any gullies or impassible terrain.

SOUNDS of shouting came from behind him in the distance. He spurred ahead, giving no thought to conserving his horse. After a time, the monks fell back, meaning to let him tire his stallion while they trotted along at a more modest clip. He galloped hard until the animal was sweat-soaked and slobbering. When at last it could no longer continue, he stopped to listen. The wind was from the south, but he heard no sounds of pursuit. They were at least two miles behind him.

He dismounted and walked across a patch of soft ground to a rocky gulley, leaving his footprints plainly visible. Then, standing on the rock, he mounted again. The gulley led up toward the denser forest, and the monks might assume that he had gone ahead on foot. He trotted back toward them, circling here and there, and letting the stallion graze occasionally, as a riderless horse might do. When he was five-hundred yards south of the gully, he heard them coming. He reined up beside a thick clump of brush, dismounted, and crawled into the thicket to hide. The stallion was too weary to run away. It moved to a patch of grass and began grazing.

The monks came trotting toward him, following the northward trail of hoof-prints. When they were a stone's throw away, he heard them

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shout and come to a halt.

"The heathen's horse! Come on!"

"No, wait! See, the trail still leads north. The horse came back alone. He's up ahead."

"The stallion threw him."

"Or refused to run any farther, more likely. See how he droops."

"Our pig undoubtedly took to the woods. Come! Let's see where the trail ends!"

Passing a dozen yards from where he lay hidden, the monks galloped northward. He waited a moment, dragged himself out of the brush, and caught the stallion. Occasionally he caught a glimpse of them through the sparse trees, but they did not look back. He mounted behind a cedar and trotted slowly to the east. In the distance he could hear them clattering up the rocks in the gully. If they wasted much time in searching for a place where his footprints left the gully, he might have a chance to escape.

The trees became thinner as he rode east. After a few minutes, he stood at the edge of the wide treeless plateau. Twenty miles to the east, mountains arose. The country between was gently rolling. Glancing to the north and south, he saw a ribbon of road appearing here and there on the low slopes. One of the highways of the ancients, cracked and pitted, overgrown by creeping vines. He mounted a slight rise and it lay below him.

He followed the ancient road for half-an-hour, letting the horse rest occasionally, and listening for sounds of pursuit. There were none. Sometimes, when the road wound up a hill, he could see the mouth of the gulley in the distance, but the monks had evidently gone on back into the forest. He trotted quickly over the high places, and moved slowly in the ravines. Once the road forked and he chose the right branch. There was a square heap of rubble on a hilltop just ahead.

He stopped on the summit, and for a moment the monks were forgotten. Toward the northeast, the ribbon of weathered rock led into a sunswept ruin of broken stone. A five-mile expanse of crumbled masonry, shimmering mysteriously from rising currents of hot air. A mighty rock-garden where green clusters of brush and vines found root in the midst of desolation. The ancient city of which Petru had spoken. It left him breathless.

He rode over the crest of the ridge and stopped again to think. Escaping the monks was only a secondary goal. He had to avoid falling into their hands, lest they defeat his purpose — that of returning stealthily to the valley and . . .

. . . And what? Could he destroy the pylon? Could he break into the sealed vaults and tear the entrails out of the sky-monster's sub-unit? The whole tribe stood between him and the goal. He knew nothing of the pylon's inner workings, nor what guarded and repaired the mechanisms when things went wrong, what

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monster had removed the spear he had thrown. Without knowledge it was a fool's errand, a grandiose hope that could end only on the flogging post. Perhaps when they amputated his arms at the elbows, they would let him live, as a beggar among them.

Should he give it up then?

A faint hope was gnawing at his mind. Fra Petru had said there had been pylons upon the plain, before the great uprising destroyed them. An ancient city lay before him. Surely it had possessed a pylon. What would be left of it amid the ruins? Enough to lend him a few scraps of needed knowledge?

Revenge was blind. It told him to escape before the monks discovered his ruse, escape to the northern border of the valley and become a night-riding scourge seeking blood to pay for Mara's blood. But sanity told him to wait, to proceed cautiously, in the hope of securing a greater goal.

Still uncertain, he rode on toward the city. There was a stone monument beside the road ahead, and he stopped to read its inscription:

BEWARE OF BETA RADIATION
PROBABLY UNSAFE
BEFORE 2850 AD
Test with Geiger before entering
Reclaim crews use suits
Do not linger

What was its meaning? It was clearly a warning, but the piper could not understand all of the words. He said them over to himself several times. Then he remembered the legends of poisoned ground. The warning could be nothing else. He pondered the date—2850. The year had not yet arrived; Bel kept the calendars according to the old reckoning of time.

But he had lost faith in the legends. Some might be true, but none were completely trustworthy. He girded his doubts with skepticism and rode a hundred steps past the sign. He felt nothing.

The legend claimed that any man who trod upon the poisoned ground would be stricken with a plague of bloody warts and would surely lose his hair. Ton looked carefully at the skin of his arm, and gingerly felt his scalp. No such curse had descended upon him. Unquestionably the legend was a lie. He snorted scornfully and proceeded toward the unpeopled wilderness of rain-washed masonry and sleepy lizards.

A great silence hung over the wasteland of broken rock. He had ridden nearly half the distance toward the center of the city, hearing only the slow *clip clup clip* of the hooves as he picked his way through the ruins. Then a low wail, like the cry of an infant, came to his ears. He stopped quickly, feeling the faint prickling of his nape.

The wail became a piercing shriek, knifing through the dead silence. It

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rose and fell in volume, ending in a low gurgle, to be followed by a staccato *"eh eh eh eh eh eh!"* too mindless to be laughter. Echoes floated back and forth across the ruins.

Ton clutched the cleaver which he had taken from the guard and stood up in the stirrups to stare about him.

Then he saw it — a small misshapen creature — peering at him from a low heap of rubble. It stood motionless, wearing a toothless grin. It was about three feet high, wrinkled with age or disease. Its skin was livid-white and hairless, festered with patches of sores. The head was bloated and twisted. Its gaze was the fearless gaze of idiocy.

The piper shuddered at the sudden realization that the creature was human, or nearly so. What devil had so twisted the flesh of Man?

Suddenly another one appeared from behind the rockpile. It was smaller than the first, and it was nursing a grotesque infant at its breast. It too stared dumbly at the horseman. Ton was too stricken to move, but at last he found voice.

"Can you tell me — where are the remains of Bel's pylon?"

At the sound of his voice, the male retreated a step, and the female ducked back behind the rockpile. After a few moments, the male grinned slowly and shrieked, "Pylon pylon pylon pylon *eh eh eh eh eh eh eh!*"

Then with a catlike motion he pounced upon a lizard that darted across the rockpile. He displayed it triumphantly and emitted the staccato cry. Suddenly he sobered. Holding the lizard out like an offering, he advanced warily toward the rider, grunting questioningly. Ton shook his head. When the creature kept coming, he clucked at the stallion and moved ahead.

He glanced back as he rode. The man-thing stopped, looking puzzled. Then it seemed to forget the rider. It savagely tore off the lizard's head and began devouring the quivering carcass.

Ton shivered and stared ahead. The knowledge that the creature was a son of Man made his flesh crawl. Bel had done this! The terrible hand that had levelled the city had also molded human putty into the shape of the small idiot. Such was the mercy of the peace-keeper. Such was the punishment he meted out when men made war.

"Eh eh eh eh eh . . ." The cry was fading out behind him.

Ton remembered the monument's warning — "Do not linger" — but still he moved ahead. The poison was here. Its silent curse had descended upon the lizard-eater. But the poison seemed to work slowly, and the piper braved its threat in his search for the remains of the pylon. Nervously he goaded the stallion to a crisper trot.

He found it at last in a rubble-filled plaza near the center of the city. Its high spike had crumbled

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near the base, and the slender structure had scattered itself over a wide area. Bits of sheet metal lay crushed beneath the rocks. Other kinds of metal had become only rust-red stains on the pitted pavement. The shape of the foundation told him that indeed a pylon had once stood in the square. Tangles of brush grew around it, rooted in the cracks.

He stared at it from a distance before approaching. The city filled him with a bitter wistful pride, a ghostly pride out of the past. Here about him lay the once-mighty house of Man, in the day of his glory. He had only to look at the ruins, to know that Man had indeed built Bel the sky-lord, as Petru claimed. He who could build it could surely destroy it. But he had been wiser, in the old days — before he learned to ask Bel when to plant corn and where to fish and how to brace the roof of his hovel. Asking Bel, he got answers, but no wisdom. And, when one knew answers, why seek wisdom?

HE rode to the base of the foundation and looked down. He gasped, bounded out of the saddle, sat on the broken wall and looked down again. There had been a room beneath the tower, a room evidently without an entrance except to the sealed vaults. Now it was heaped high with broken slabs of rock and with twisted girders that fell from overhead. But the sunlight penetrated the wreckage in places and he could see bits of broken machinery — and the top of a doorway to another room.

Most of the pylon had fallen sideways, and the subterranean vault was not completely blocked. Holding his breath, he let himself down atop the rubble-heap, then slid down it toward the top of the stone-filled doorway. There was a small opening left, but he could see nothing because of the darkness beyond. He began clearing the stones away with his hands. A shaft of sunlight penetrated the enlarged opening, and he could see that beyond the door the rubble-heap sloped away and exposed a clear patch of floor. It was covered with a foot of water that had collected from past rains.

Ton worked hurriedly until the hole was large enough to admit his body. Then he slipped through it into the gloom. He could see the faint outlines of rust-decayed machinery as he came down the rock-slide and stood in the thigh deep water. There was still another room beyond this one. He waded through the doorway into deeper darkness. The walls were covered with switching panels and the gray eyes of many dials.

Suddenly he stopped to stare. There was a faint glow coming from across the room. Something was silhouetted against it — the faint shadow — *of a man!* He seized his cleaver and backed away.

"Who are you?" he barked, and his voice reverberated in the vaults.

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There was a creaking sound. The glow of light crept along the panel, then turned toward him. The man had turned his head, and the violet glow was coming from his eyes!

Then Ton knew that it was not a man at all, but the monster who lived in the sealed vaults. His spine crawled as he backed toward the rockslide, clutching the fighting hook in one hand and the cleaver in the other. Suddenly the demon spoke in a low metallic croak, like Bel's but lower.

"Three thousand and seventeenth repetition: Robot George Eighty-Six requests human assistance in repair of damaged pylon George Eighty-Six. Repair task exceeds standard capabilities of pylon repair-robot. Emergency. Emergency. Please acknowledge request."

Ton stopped. The creature repeated the request three times. He began to understand its significance. As his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, he saw that the being was made of metal. It sat on a small metal stool, and it had been facing one of the panels. The implication of the request was almost ludicrous.

"How long have you been sitting there?" he asked it, still keeping a safe distance.

The robot clicked thoughtfully for a few moments, then said, "Answer: five hundred and twenty years, forty-five days, sixteen-point-two hours."

Since the destruction of the pylon! Ton quickly lost his fear. He laughed quietly. Any creature *that* unimaginative could scarcely offer much of a threat.

"Are you alive, or are you a part of Bel?" he asked.

The robot clicked again. "Meaningless alternative. Rephrase."

"Are you alive?"

The creature clicked forlornly, and it became evident that it didn't intend to stop.

"Can't you answer?"

There was a grunt of static, then something that sounded like: "Two-query meanibungle unreply wish-motive. Rephrase."

"Are you a part of Bel?"

"Unanswerable query. Rephrase."

TON gave up. Either the robot couldn't answer, wouldn't answer, or had to be asked in a special way. But as he stared at the glowing eyes, he realized that here was the answer to his search for the secret of the vaults. Here was the creature who repaired the pylons. If there were any way to destroy a pylon without great weapons, this being would know. But would it reveal such knowledge? He would have to proceed cautiously.

"Who do you serve?" he asked. "Man or Bel?"

Again the slow clicking. "Meaningless query. Meaningless alternative."

"Why is it meaningless?" the piper snapped.

"Answer: confusion of categories. Robot-George-Eighty-Six - Concept,

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labelled 'I', is memorized in 'mechanical-equipment' category. Service-concept is memorized in 'anthropo-vocabulary' category. Robot 'I' cannot act as subject for verb 'to serve'."

Vaguely Ton began to understand. The creature was a machine, nothing more. "What is your function then?" he tried.

"To effect necessary repairs within the cybernetic circuits and microwave transceiving equipment of Informator Pylon Number George Eighty Six," droned the robot.

Still Ton did not have the answer he wanted. "Why do you perform this function?"

There was a brief clicking, then: "Robot 'I' am motivated by pleasure-pain principles, based on relationship: operating - efficiency equals pleasure; suspended operation equals pain." Another click. "Robot requests human assistance in repair of pylon George Eighty-Six . . ."

It repeated the plea three times again. Ton wondered how a creature of metal could feel pleasure or pain. How could aught but warm flesh experience them? For that matter, how could Bel be pleased or displeased? *Displeased?* This creature said *pain*. He frowned suddenly and advanced a step toward the robot.

"Tell me!" he demanded. *"Can Bel be made to feel pain?"*

The clicking began again, and lasted for a time. Ton slumped sadly fearing that another "meaningless" was inevitable. Then the reply:

"Answer: affirmative, bipossible."

"How?" He advanced another step waiting tensely.

"Alternative solutions: a pain response may be achieved by offering a sufficiently discordant aesthetic stimulus; or, a pain response may be achieved directly by psychelectric induction from a human subject who is experiencing pain."

Ton wanted to say "meaningless" to the incomprehensible answers. How could he ever understand such words? Man indeed had fallen far. The ancients had taught a little of their vast knowledge to this machine, and now the machine was wiser than the sons of the ancients. Still, he tried again: "Explain how one would go about causing pain to Bel, directly."

The robot's head turned slowly to the left. The glow of its eyes fell upon an object that lay on a workbench. Ton recognized it quickly. It was a helmet from the pylon's interrogator unit! He shivered at the memory of his encounter with the device on the night of his banishment.

The robot began croaking facts from its memory. "By use of the psychelectric inductor, a human subject's experiences may be induced into the circuits of the satellite units. In this way, the unit's behavior was originally conditioned by reward and punishment experiences. Units were rewarded for satisfactory performance by applying pleasureable

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stimuli to human subjects . . ."

AS Ton listened, he began to grasp something of the robot's meaning. In short: Bel had been trained as a child was trained! By reward and punishment, through the medium of a man who sat in the interrogation unit and allowed himself to be hurt or pleased, depending upon Bel's performance in the learning-tasks. And through the minds of the subjects, Bel learned to derive pleasure from the things that gave men pleasure — music, art, dancing—whatever could be learned through the interrogation unit and later experienced through the eyes and ears of the pylon. But there was always the danger of pain becoming pleasant through hedonic contrast, as happened the night of Mara's death.

"Tell me, can the interrogation units still be used to give pain?"

"Affirmative. The subject should be unconscious. The painful stimulus should be applied by another party."

Ton sat down upon the rubble-heap to think. The ghost of a plan was glimmering in his mind. But he found it difficult to reason it out; suddenly he realized that he was feeling ill. His skin had been itching continually since he had entered the vaults, and now it felt dry, burning —as if exposed too long to the hot sun. Effects of the lingering poison?

The idea frightened him, and he thought of the lizard-eater again. He started up the rubble-heap, then paused, looking back at the glowing eyes. Immediately the robot repeated his plea for assistance in the repair of the pylon.

"Come with me, if you can walk," the piper ventured. "The pylon cannot be repaired."

"If that is true, then my function is ended," rasped the machine. "Operating query: may I turn myself off?"

"No, come with me."

"Operating query: is leaving the pylon not a breach of efficient function?"

"No, come with me."

Slowly the repair robot creaked to its feet, and shuffled mechanically after its new master. Man and machine went out into the sunlight together. Dustclouds wisped along a ridge to the southwest. The monks had come. And there was a single horseman galloping through the outskirts of the city. Ton mounted and stared at the distant figure. It was Vigge the Boar, son of Cron. He paused a moment, then rode slowly toward his adversary, with the robot shuffling behind him.

AS the riders came within five-hundred yards of each other, Vigge reined up to stare at the robot that followed his enemy. Ton kept coming at an easy jog. He knew he was riding into possible death, if Vigge were not a fool. The piper was no burly fighter, and in a hand to hand duel, the boar could cut him down easily. He gambled that Vigge

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was a fool. Two hundred paces away, he stopped and spoke to the robot.

"Continue walking straight ahead."

Purring quietly, the gleaming metal figure strode slowly amid the rubble toward the frozen Vigge.

"Here is your new king, Vigge!" the piper shouted. *"A Bel that walks!"*

The son of Cron did nothing. Was he indeed a fool? Or would he come and fight? Wise men had built the Lord Bel as a tool; fools had become the tools of the tool. The ancients had said, "One man is as good as another." It was their greatest mistake, for it led to: "Folly is as good as wisdom." Ton had no hope but to turn Man's folly against Bel. There was too little wisdom left in the world to use *it* as a weapon.

"Bow to your new king, Vigge!"

The boar's bearded face had gone white in the sunlight as he watched the robot's calm approach. He reined his horse sideways in the street. His hand snaked toward a quiver, and in an instant he had fitted an arrow to his bow. Ton waited motionlessly, realizing that the arrow might be directed toward him. If Vigge were not a fool . . .

Cling . . .!

The steel-tipped shaft struck the robot's body and shattered. The robot continued its humorless march. *"Operating query: is there a purpose in this projectile?"*

Vigge launched another arrow, but it flew wide. The robot caught it in midair with quick tweezerlike fingers and paused to inspect it. Vigge howled and bolted away, ducking low over the neck of the horse.

"Tell the tribe I am returning!" Ton thundered after him. "Tell them I bring this walking Bel to be their king!"

Vigge continued his flight without looking back.

"Operating query: why does the man run?"

"Because fools have inherited the earth," Ton told him.

They continued on toward the ridge where the monks waited, fearful of the poisoned earth of the city. The piper hoped fervently that Vigge would indeed return to the valley with a wild tale of the metal monster, confusing and frightening the tribe. But two monks saw the fleeing Boar and set out in hot pursuit. They vanished over a hill to the northwest.

He stopped just beyond crossbow range of the hilltop and spoke again to the robot. "If you will obey me, you will have a pylon again."

The creature hesitated, clicking over his memories. Then: "Operating suggestion: supervised-control switch is located beneath grasping mechanism."

The piper noticed the switch but hesitated. "What does it do?"

"It removes self-inhibiting bias-controls. It suppresses ethical conditioning."

Nervously, he flicked the switch. "Can you attack a human being?"

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"Supervised-robot relies upon supervisor for ethical judgment. Query: who is my supervisor?"

"I'll do," the piper grunted. "Now go on toward those horsemen. Tell them what you told me about causing pain to Bel. Then come back. If they try to capture you, resist."

The robot stalked toward the hill and up it. Ton waited, expecting the monks to flee as Vigge had done. They mounted their horses and held crossbows ready. He saw two of them cross themselves. But then the robot stopped and he heard the distant intonation of the mechanical voice.

Half an hour later, a shout floated to him from the hill. "Come out of the city, piper!"

"You agree to a truce?" he bellowed in reply.

"We promise nothing! Come out! Stay longer and you die of the poison."

Already he felt weak and dizzy. Slowly he rode forward, grumbling to himself. The tight-strained steel of crossbows threatened him with their deadly bolts as he drew near. The monks' faces were dispassionate masks that watched him calmly.

"Are you ready to be our prisoner now, piper?" a voice barked. It was the short and chunky Andru.

Ton reined up a few feet away, and the monks moved to encircle him. The robot stood clicking in wait for a command.

"If they behave hostilely, kill them," he said quietly.

WHETHER or not the robot was capable of killing, he did not know, but the warning had its effect. The monks hesitated nervously, casting wary glances at the creature of steel. He wasted no time in taking advantage of their indecision.

"I am not your prisoner. Let me make that clear."

Andru flourished his weapon. "This says you are."

Ton eyed the sharp tip of the crossbow bolt coldly. "Fire it at the robot," he offered.

Andru swung around in the saddle and hesitated.

"Catch the missile when it comes, George Eighty-Six."

Andru snorted and let fly with a sharp twang. The robot brought back the bolt and handed it to the startled monk.

"I am not your prisoner." There was a hushed moment on the hilltop. Then the piper said, "I am going to the valley before the next Belrise, to fight. I welcome any who would come with me. But if you are cowards, stay behind."

Andru straightened in the saddle and frowned angrily. "We forbid you to go from the plateau. We cannot allow Bel to learn of our . . ."

"Plan? *Fool!* You have no plan. Only a distant daydream. I will act now." He moved out of the circle, but stopped again. The monks held the bows ready to cut him down, and Andru's mouth was open to bark the command. He waited.

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"I advise you to go no farther," the monk warned.

"Will you listen to my plan?"

Andru smirked. "Why not? But it will gain you nothing."

Ton came back and they sat in a circle on the ground, speaking of the valley and the pylon, and frequently questioning the robot, who seemed to care nothing for the welfare of the total Bel, but who illogically wanted a pylon to keep, whether or not there be a Bel to give it purpose. The piper watched Andru's face as they talked. The cubby monk said little, nor did his expression change save for an occasional narrowing of the eyes or shake of the head. But his thick hands moved with clumsy nervousness and impatience. Once he idly sketched a map of the valley in the sand with a twig, locating the river and the pylon and the community of tribe George-Eighty.

When Ton finished speaking, there was a moment of silence. Several of the monks shook their heads, and his heart sank. But Andru was still absorbed in his map, seemingly only half-aware that the piper was waiting for an answer. With the twig, he touched the headwaters of the river, where it emptied out of a lake in the foothills. He spoke musingly.

"An army could float down the river at night, perhaps without arousing any warning until they were in the midst of the camp."

"Nay!" said another. "The eyes of Bel can see in darkness!"

"Fool!" Andru grunted. "Haven't you listened? Bel will not see."

"You'll help then!" Ton gasped.

The monk looked startled, and seemed to come awake. Then he shrugged and looked uncomfortable. "I can make no such decisions. It is up to the abbot. And I can tell you the abbot will say no."

"But *why?* Isn't the plan good?"

"It is — risky — doubtful." He looked apologetic. "I like it, personally. But long ago, our course of action was decided upon. We must wait, preserving our small slice of civilization for the future. When Bel wears out, or exhausts his power units, we will act. Our prophets predict a thousand years — from the time Bel was first built. Now we have only a few generations to wait."

"Why wait, if my plan is good?"

"Because — if your plan failed, our order would be destroyed. And there would be no hope at all for the future."

Ton stood up angrily. "Are *you* all that separates Man from beast? No hope? Not even in the very fact of Man's continued existence? Granted the plan might fail! And that your order would be destroyed. Are you so indispensible? Fools! I'm going alone!"

He mounted the stallion and started away from the circle at a slow walk, with the robot moving behind. He kept stiffly erect, waiting for the crossbow bolt to find a home in his back. The monks came restlessly

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to their feet and spoke among themselves in low voices, but none moved to stop him. Suddenly Andru called out, and he turned to look back.

"We have an extra pack-donkey, piper."

"So?"

The monk grinned. "Your mechanical friend will wear out his joints a'walking."

Ton accepted the offer with embarrassed gratitude. But there was something ludicrous in the sight of Repair-Robot George Eighty-Six sitting stiffly astride the small sad animal. As they started away, Andru murmured, "And their king came riding upon an ass's colt." But no one laughed.

They set out for a long ride, in the direction in which Vigge the Boar had disappeared, but at the edge of the forest they turned northward.

IT was three days' ride to the lake where several streams converged to form Keeper Jon's River, as the valley's waterway was called. When he approached the area, Ton moved cautiously, for hunters and fishermen sometimes ventured up-valley to wander about its banks. And, as long as he could see the pylon in the distance, there was the danger of the pylon's seeing *him*. Its eyes could look all about the valley, and see many things at once.

The Bel-satellite had sunk however. For nearly thirty hours, the pylon would be inoperative, for the voice of the moon needed a clear pathway between itself and the tower before it could establish contact.

He spent the afternoon building a light raft of fallen logs. Then, at sundown, he spoke to the robot. "Ride alone into the valley. Go to the pylon and enter the vaults. Leave them open, and wait for me to come. People will see you, and probably run away. But if they speak to you, say nothing. If they question you, tell them you're an emissary of Bel."

"Impossible request. Am designed to give correct answers to queries, and to obey requests where possible."

Ton slumped in disgust. "If you had a tongue I'd cut it out! You'll ruin everything if you talk to the keeper."

The robot clicked for a moment. "Suggest analogous operation in lieu of tongue removal."

He laughed grimly. "What are you talking about?"

"Suggest you disconnect my speech-centers."

"You don't care?"

"Meaningless query. Rephrase."

"Of course. A machine couldn't care. But what about your hearing? If someone orders you to stop, will you stop?"

"Negative. Disconnected speech-centers fail to interpret auditory sensations."

Ton stood over him for a moment, staring down at the spherical skull plate. "Can you loosen it?"

Without hesitation, the robot

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screwed off the top of his head, revealing a tangled maze of hairlike wires that appeared to have been wadded irreverently together and dipped in salt, for the entire mass was impregnated with millions of tiny crystals. Looking closely, he could see that each wire was discontinuous at the crystals, and the crystals were junction-points for several wires. "How was it made?" he asked in awe.

"The neural fibers are first assembled in the form of a plane web," the robot explained. "The web is then rolled on a drum coated with mild adhesive. Then the fibers are cut at each junction point, and the drum is chilled to 30 degrees Absolute. While chilled, the crystals are deposited at the broken junctions. Warming it sets up internal stresses in the crystals causing their synapse-like behavior. The web is then sprayed with a solvent to remove the adhesive, sprayed with an insulating varnish, removed from the drum and stretched on a rack. Several hundred plane-webs are connected into a cubic web. The cubic mesh is then bundled randomly into the metal case, connected to the sensory circuits, and sent to the master-memory units for conditioning."

Ton shook his head. "Just skip it. I shouldn't have asked. How do I disconnect the speech center?"

The robot told him, but in the end, performed the operation for himself. Ton reset the switch to ask a sudden question.

"Would you mind if I destroyed you?"

The robot looked up slowly. "Meaningless query. Rephrase."

"Why is it meaningless?"

"I am incapable of affective reactions except in terms of pylon-efficiency."

"You would feel nothing if I destroyed you?"

"I would cease to feel."

Ton shook his head. Somehow he could not get across the 'fear of death' idea.

"If I told you to destroy yourself, would you do it."

"Affirmative, provided present supervisory status is in effect."

"And if it weren't?"

"Then I would be capable of refusing if it were in the best interests of efficient pylon operation."

TON snapped off the speech circuits again with a thoughtful click, and waved the robot on his way. The last rays of twilight were fading as George Eighty-Six rode slowly along the shore-trail toward the lake's outlet, toward the valley and toward the pylon. He had spent many hours in briefing the robot on what was to be done when he arrived at the pylon, but a thousand things could go wrong.

Worst of all, he knew nothing of the science behind Bel's workings. Nor could he predict the robot's reactions to certain situations. He could only try to think of George Eighty-Six as a human being who

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was without emotion, except in terms of a vocation. But the analogy was bad and he knew it. The robot was only a machine; and not understanding the machine's workings, Ton could only personify. He knew that he could expect obedience only when his commands were in keeping with the mechanical principles involved in the robot's structure.

And if the robot failed to do as he was told when he arrived at the pylon, then Ton would, in a few hours, be riding into certain death.

He watched in the direction of the valley, where a few fires gleamed about the vicinity of the pylon. The tribe was attending to the usual evening chores — milking goats, hovering over the cookpots, resting from the day's labor. How would they react when a gleaming creature of steel with glowing eyes came riding silently through their midst? The widow and the sons of Keeper Cron lived in their quarters at the pylon's base. Vigge, if he had returned, would recognize the robot. He had fled before, but how would he behave at home? If he attacked, George Eighty-Six would undoubtedly let himself be destroyed.

Vigge had undoubtedly been put in the interrogation unit, if he had returned—unless Bel had never known of his departure. If he had been interrogated. Bel would know everything that Vigge had seen and done upon the plateau, including the episode in the city, when the Boar had turned tail before the metal apparition. And, if the people inquired, Bel would have explained the nature of the robot Vigge had seen. But would the explanation make George Eighty-Six's appearance anytheless terrifying? It would simply tend to confirm the legend of the demon who lurked in the pylon's vaults. The demon's sudden appearance should still cause plenty of consternation.

When George Eighty-Six had had time to reach the pylon, Ton cut loose the raft and poled along the shoreline toward the stretch of rapids which would carry him swiftly downriver toward the distant pylon. He could see only dimly in the faint light of a crescent moon. The swift waters were threateningly black. The valley waited quietly ahead of him. It had promised to take his arms if he returned. He hoped, by using the river, to escape detection until he was in the midst of the village. He hoped that the tribe's attention would be focused upon the robot that had appeared amongst them.

He lay stretched flat on the rushing raft, covering himself with branches so that from the bank, the crude craft would appear to be a tangle of drift, floating down from the hills. Twice he heard horsemen galloping along the river-trail — either running away from the robot, or going to tell the outskirts of the news. The swift current bore him rapidly down to where the river widened, then more slowly. He passed amid the hovels of fishermen, and past bright areas ablaze with

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bonfires. Breathing renewed hate, he watched the slender spike of the pylon drift closer on his left. Why hadn't George Eighty-Six given him the signal that all was well?

Then while he waited, it came. The floodlights, normally turned off while Bel was below the horizon, flashed to full brilliance — and died again. A chaotic babble of excited voices came to his ears. During the brief flash of light, he saw that only a few men were brave enough to venture onto the stone ramp around the base of the tower. The crowds hung back to stare from the shadows. A few torches wandered about the area.

THE piper slipped silently into the water and swam to shore. On the bank, he paused to smear his face and arms with black mud, to prevent immediate recognition. It was dark, and the crowds were excited; he hoped they would pay no attention to him as he slipped toward the south side of the pylon, where lay the vaults.

He trotted quickly behind a row of huts, scurried across an open space, galloped around a tight group of women who were chattering excitedly, and reached the edge of the ramp.

"Ho there!" called a gruff voice. "Go no closer. Keeper Walin forbids it." The man was approaching with a torch.

Ton broke into a dead run toward the vault-entrance. The man bellowed angrily. An arrow skittered across the stones, narrowly missing the piper's flank. Ducking and dodging, he made it to the entrance. The robot had left it open, as instructed. As he slipped into the blackness, he paused to emit a piercing scream, hoping to convince the guards that it was unsafe to follow him. But had he been recognized? With his mud-daubed face, and the screening darkness, recognition was doubtful. He slammed the great steel door and tried to peer about in the gloom. He saw the robot's eyes, and heard the approaching footsteps. But was it George Eighty-Six — or the robot which tended *this* pylon. He waited tensely.

Then the lights came on and the robot began unscrewing his skull plate. He renewed the speech-circuits and waited for instructions. Ton stared about nervously. "Where's the other robot?"

"I turned it off, as supervisor instructed," croaked George Eighty-Six.

"Wasn't there a fight?"

"Meaningless query. Repair robot has no self-preserving desires, except for sake of efficient pylon operation."

Ton was suddenly glad that George Eighty-Six was still under supervision. If the switch was thrown to Auto, the robot would probably throw him out to the wolf-pack and take over the pylon. On "supervise," he could not help obeying.

The piper barked orders quickly.

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"Prepare the pylon as if Bel were about to speak. Bel will speak with your voice. You will say what I tell you to say. And get the other robot back into supervised operation."

OUTSIDE on the ramp, the guards were still busily warning the curious to stay back from the base of the pylon, lest they too follow the way of the one who had screamed so hideously from the mouth of the vaults. But when the eyes of Bel came alight, and when the floodlights flickered on, the guards ceased to have trouble with the crowd. The people backed away in fright; for who had ever heard Bel speak when the small moon was below the horizon.

"BLAH-*OOO*-BAH!" came the summons, thundering from the loudspeakers below the empty balcony.

"Keeper Walin!" a guard called. "Where is Keeper Walin?"

Soon the heir of Cron appeared, and strode nervously across the ramp. He looked up, then stopped, frozen in place. For the balcony was no longer empty. A gleaming creature of steel stood there, impassively looking out over the heads of the people. Somewhere a woman screamed, and the sound of fleeing footsteps pattered hysterically in the night. But many remained, keeping a safe distance.

"blah-ooo-bah!" came a faint echo from the hills.

"Keeper Walin will come to the balcony," rasped the loudspeaker.

Walin, on the ramp below, hesitated. "Who is speaking?" he quavered.

"It is I, Bel, speaking through my son who stands before you. Come."

"How can you speak, when—"

"COME!"

Walin advanced on unsure legs. He disappeared into the stairway entrance, and a minute later, slipped onto the balcony to stand warily at a safe distance from the gaunt, motionless robot.

"What is your wish, O Bel?" asked the frightened keeper.

"You are guilty of war-crimes," the loudspeaker charged bluntly. *"I shall scourge the valley with fire, and poison it for a thousand years. Three of your people invaded the lands of tribe George Seventy-Eight and killed four people."*

The crowd moaned, and Walin sputtered. This was apparently news to everyone.

"If this is true, then let the criminals be punished," pleaded Walin. "But do not destroy us all."

"All are guilty, for not preventing such action. All will die! The scourge will pass over the valley at tomorrow's nightfall. The land will be laid waste as far as the hills."

Suddenly the lights went out. The voice was gone. The interview was at an end. A sobbing wail went up from the town. The keeper turned to bolt from the balcony, but the robot caught him with an almost leisurely gesture, shouldered him,

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and bore him away toward the vaults. Walin was screaming with real fervor.

Supervised Repair-Robot George Eighty, whose speech centers were dead, brought the struggling keeper into the vaults as ordered, and held him securely before the grinning eyes of Ton, and the emotionless eyes of George Eighty-Six, who had spoken through the loudspeakers at the piper's bidding. When Walin saw the identity of his captor, he whitened, gagged, and then, realizing in part what had transpired, he began choking out sputters of cursing and gasping threats.

Ton sat grinning on the stool before a control panel and watched the ex-keeper silently until he exhausted his supply of invective. Then he asked, "Where's your brother, Vigge?"

"He's dead! As you'll be soon, piper. He was interrogated when he returned. He died from a flogging. Bel said he killed two men on the plateau. I had hoped one of them was you."

"Dead!" Ton was startled. Vigge the boar had been a part of his plan. Vigge the torturer, who flayed his game alive, would have been a fitting candidate for the interrogation chamber when the time came to offer Bel a pain stimulus through a human subject. Now Walin would have to do. But he didn't like the idea so well. Walin was indeed an enemy, but he had committed no crime, other than the universal crime of stupidity. The piper's stomach knotted at the thought of telling one of the robots to torture him to death in the interrogation chair.

He spoke to George Eighty-Six. "Take him down to the lower chambers of the vaults and tie him securely. We'll need him later."

THE robot calmly dragged the screaming, kicking Walin away. But the piper was not so certain that he could bring himself to sacrifice an innocent man. Who else was available? No one. The crowds were already fleeing toward the hills, and the village was becoming deserted, as he had expected. The threat of destruction was sending them into a panicked exodus. They had no way of investigating the false charge that three men had invaded sector seventy-eight. Every man would suspect his neighbor, but unless they met someone from Tribe Seventy-Eight who could deny the charge, they would believe it.

One thing was certain: shortly after Bel arose again, the valley would indeed be scourged. Ton hoped that the people could escape to the plateau before it happened, but he himself would have to remain. It wouldn't be pleasant, hanging back to die alone. Again he recalled Mara's torn body lying on the pavement just outside, and he set his course by that memory.

Looking about at the sleeping, incomprehensible machinery that helped rule the race of Man since

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the passing of his glory, he felt small and weak and uncertain. As he prepared to doze in wait for dawn within the security of the vault, he wished for his pipes that he might reassure himself with their plaintive pleating. For he suddenly realized what he was going to have to do, since Vigge was dead, and he longed not to think about it until the time came. Four robot eyes stared fixedly in the darkness while their temporary supervisor slept. They seemed to know nothing of the true meaning of what was happening, nor to care—so long as they were under supervised operation. But if, a switch clicked to "Auto," their tower- preserving motivation would step to the fore, and Ton would become an enemy. After a sleepless period, he arose, found a bit of wire, and tied two toggle-switches firmly and permanently in "supervise" position Then he slept more securely.

Daybreak brought silence. The sun crept up in the east to look upon a valley that had become unpeopled during the night. Ton left the vaults to survey the deserted village from the balcony. Here and there an old man or a cripple lingered still, loath to leave the place of their birth. But they were going — all of them. By seizing Walin, he had deprived them of a leader who could possibly have prevented the hysterical flight toward the plateau. He smiled faintly as he watched a distant dust-streamer from beyond the river. A party of horsemen was fleeing toward the forests, toward the place where he had first set out for the plateau on the grim night of Mara's death.

"May the monks teach them new ways," he murmured, after the floating streamer of dust.

But the pylon had to be destroyed, lest they return. And Ton the piper, who had no access to the weapons of the ancients, could not destroy the great structure of steel and stone to the extent that it could not be used again. What he and the robots could tear down, the robots alone could easily repair. He must force the Lord Bel to destroy his own pylon. But in doing so, Ton himself would perish with it — for he would be the bait.

He shrugged away a slight shiver and went back to the vaults. He spent the rest of the day watching the robots obey his order — "Tear away Bel's eyes and ears so that he may not see the people are gone. Make the pylon blind and deaf, and muffle its voice to a whisper. Leave an ear within the vaults so that I can speak to him." The machines obeyed without protest, quietly tearing loose wires and reconnecting them, shutting down power units, and setting up new equipment in the vaults.

While they worked, Ton went out into the deserted village and brought back food. He loosened Walin's bonds and let him stretch his limbs. He watched him eat in silence, and thought, "How easy it would be to let him die in my stead."

Walin wore a surly sneer as he

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finished eating. "What do you plan to do next, piper?" he growled.

Ton hesitated. "Release you, as soon as I'm certain you can't catch up with the others."

The keeper carefully suppressed any surprise he might have felt. "And then?"

"See that the promise to destroy the valley is made good."

Walin laughed with unbelief.

"Then I invite you to stay with me while it's destroyed," Ton said grimly. "Tell me, do you feel nothing but reverence for Bel after all that has happened? You have seen Bel's robots serving me. You have heard Bel's voice used in my cause. You still call him a god?"

Walin set his mouth mockingly and said nothing. Ton saw the sarcasm in his eyes and suddenly realized that in all probability, the Keeper Family had always known the true nature of Bel. He stalked out in disgust, and sent a robot back to escort Walin from the vaults and release him. The keeper set out quickly toward the river. Ton waited for the awakening of the pylon.

THE bloody countenance of the sun mopped the western sky with red as it dragged itself below the hills. The chill wind of evening swept down the valley, and the first erratic clickings began in the vaults. The circuits were coming alive as the first feeble flickers of Bel's approach reached the pylon.

The time had come. The valley was left deserted by the exodus. The lonely piper stood alone to face the wrath of the god his fathers had built. He had made both robots inoperative, lest Bel be able to command them. They lay lifeless on the floor of the vaults.

Suddenly, the vaults came alive with eerie glow. The banks of tubes fluttered into operation. Outside, the small satellite was clear of the horizon. Bel was with him.

There was no summons this time. Nothing but the clicking of relays. An eye, set in the ceiling, turned slowly to look about the room, paused briefly on the robots, and stopped to stare fixedly at the piper who stood before the microphone, waiting.

"Operating query," whispered the small speaker. "Why have the sensory circuits been disconnected? Who is responsible?"

"You are responsible. You are guilty, Bel. You will be punished."

The sky-monster was incapable of anger. It seemed to be analyzing the situation quietly.

"Operating query: Logic circuits infer the probability that you have caused the tribe to leave the valley. Is this correct?"

Ton nodded slowly toward the glowing eye. "They have gone. We are alone."

"Advise that you abandon your intentions and submit to punishment. Any sabotage against the keeper of the peace is warcrime. Reflexive response to warcrime is release of nu-

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clear weapons from satellite station."

Ton turned away and walked to the interrogation chamber. The chair and the helmet were waiting. The robots had made the necessary changes. A light had been placed so that it would focus a white-hot point of pain upon the subject's chest. He sat stiffly in the chair and pulled the helmet down over his head. The light flashed on, and he howled. A microphonic-controlled switch cut it off again, waited five seconds, and flashed it again.

Dizzyness came over him. The periods of pain and of recovery seemed to grow longer. His vision faded, and he could no longer hear himself scream. A distant point in a gray void rushed toward him and opened out into a clear space.

He looked around. Someone was moaning in pain. Then he saw the man — writhing to escape a white-hot gnat that stabbed him. The man —it was an old friend! He hurried forward and knelt to comfort him. The man looked up. "Please," he gasped. "What have I done to you? Make it stop!"

Ton realized with horror that he himself was causing the man's pain, and that he had the power to make it cease. Quickly he moved to brush the gnat away, then paused.

This has happened before! I must not be fooled!

"Please. . . ."

Ton stood up and closed his eyes. More than anything else, he wished to help the man — to ease his pain. He gritted his teeth and refused to look at him.

"Destroy yourself," he told the sufferer.

"No, no! Make it stop!" The man was twisting and howling each time the point of light stabbed at him.

"What is your name?"

"I am — the Keeper of the Peace! Make it — stop!"

"Destroy yourself." Ton opened his eyes and kicked the sufferer in the face.

The gray void pulsed with fear. "Destroy yourself! It will never stop!" the piper roared.

Groaning, the man sat up. His eyes were the eyes of Bel. His face was a face of granite and steel. His mouth croaked metallic sounds.

"I will wait then," he said. "We will see who can live the longest. Look at your chest."

Ton looked, and grew sick. There was a black spot, charred and blistered. He felt nothing, but the wound was there—growing steadily worse. Each time the white point bit at his adversary, the burn grew deeper upon Ton's chest, but it was not really harming the other man. One received the wound, the other felt its pain.

"I'll kill you myself," the piper roared. He launched himself upon the other and began digging his fingers into the throat. With horror, he realized that his own breathing had ceased—but it was the stranger who felt the choking.

For a long time they fought. The

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man was screaming wildly, and his eyes were glazed with pain. For Ton, the void was growing grayer. The stranger seemed to be slipping through his fingers. The reality of his own person was fading. With a last desperate effort, he gouged his fingers into the stranger's eyes and tore.

There was a last shriek. Then the stranger ceased to be a man. He contracted slowly into a small orange ball. The piper, his vision dimmed, drew slowly away to watch.

The orange ball grew larger. It seemed to be spinning slowly in a dark heaven. A crack appeared in its surface. Blue-white fire showed through the crack. The fire pushed its way forth slowly. It was a leisurely explosion—a sphere opening slowly into a terrible flower of fire. And then Ton ceased to see it.

He saw only the light that had seared his chest, winking on and off. He arched his back and slumped as far as he could to one side. The light found a new spot to burn. He could not turn it off, but at last he tore his arms free of the clamps that bound them to the chair. Some of the flesh stayed with the clamps. He slumped to the floor in a puddle of blackness. He had won. Bel was dead. And Man was free.

A scarred and wizened piper sat upon the wall of the monastery grounds, bleating a melody that leaped among the crags and carried itself high on the wind. He was playing for his own amusement, but his audience was a group of men who were laying stone for the new city that was growing up around the monastery. As darkness approached, the pipes emitted a discordant, mocking bleat.

The workmen straightened, looked up curiously at the piper, then followed his eyes to the east, where a few flecks of debris were appearing over the horizon. A chubby workman grinned, and turned to bow.

"How are you pleased, O piper?"

The pipes skirled irreverently, but as he looked at the growing city of Man, he was pleased plus three. And proud.

—THE END—

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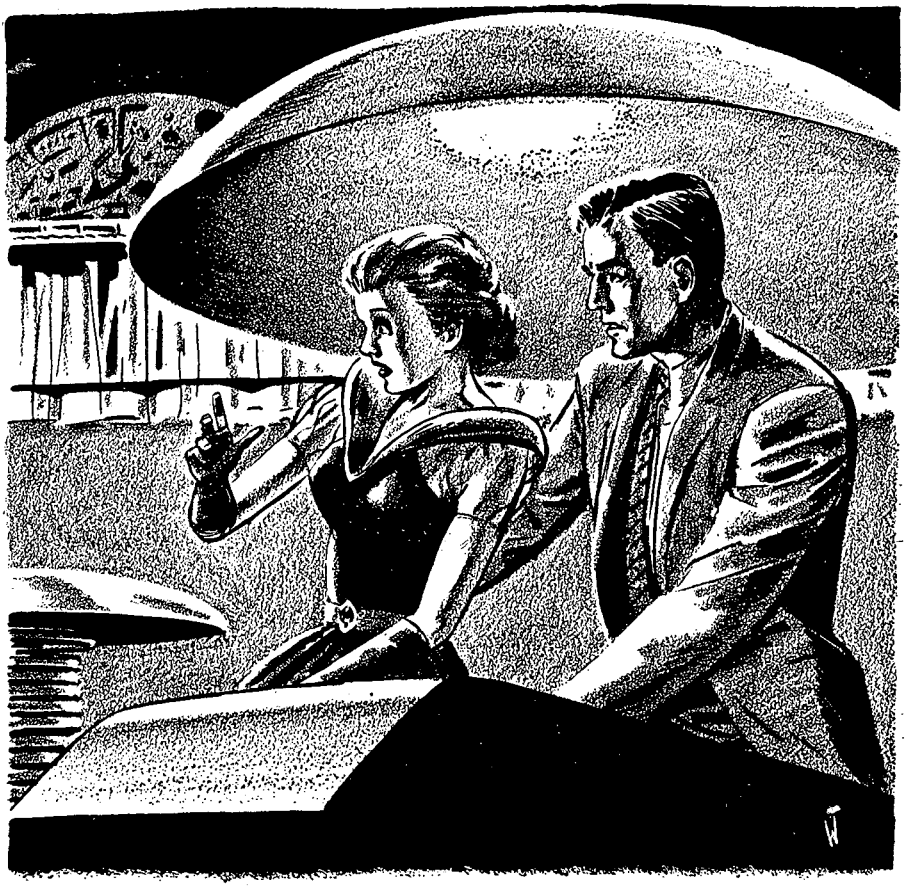

The SUN-SMITHS

By Richard S. Shaver

Illustration by Bill Terry

Presenting Part II of the great, new science-fiction novel which marks the return of the author of the famous Shaver Mystery!

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What has gone before

On May 20, 2184, the Interplanetary Commerce Court sentenced June Tyne to life imprisonment on Karnak, the Prison Asteroid, on a trumped up charge of narcotics smuggling. It was because her trading activities were beginning to cut in on those of the powerful Big importers. Competition was something they didn't want. Two years June languished in the prison; then she figured out a way to escape, and disguised as the old trusty, Ma Mullens, she managed to steal the guardship and escape into space. However, had it not been for the fortunate passing of a large asteroid, to which she hitched her stolen ship just as she ran out of fuel, recapture would have been a certainty. Now, however, she faced death by starvation as the asteroid bore her out into unknown space. Donning a space suit, she explored the chunk of rock on which she was marooned, and discovered the wreck of another, much older spaceship. It was not long before she found, also, a huge metal door in the side of a rocky escarpment. Opening it, she found herself in a strange cavern full of enigmatic machines and equipment. In a large room, lying on a huge bed, surrounded by gadgets, she found the corpse of a man dressed in ancient clothes. However, upon accidental throwing of a switch, she discovered the "dead" man was not dead, but only sleeping in suspended animation . . . To her terror, he awakes. In an archaic form of English he addresses her, and she discovers that he has been sleeping deliberately, awaiting what he terms a "connection with the next cometram." She does not know what a cometram is, but, by telling her the story of his life, he explains it to her . . .

His name, he tells her, is Agar, and he has always borne the nickname "Gates." So Gates Agar he is. In his youth (he was born in 1935 in the "good old U.S.A.") he was a problem child in his university career, continually asking questions the professors could not answer, and confounding them with the errors he pointed out in their teachings. He was convinced that their picture of the past of Man was false, and that Archeology was a thing of meagre fact with an edifice thereon of mere dreams. Later, after University palled, he, with several companions, investigated a rumor of a strange buried city in Brazil where, it was said, was the "Tomb of a God." In a two-mile-deep tunnel they discovered the "tomb," but no corpse, only fantastic machines beyond the power of Earth civilization to build or even understand. Yet, there was incontrovertible evidence that it had all been constructed by the hand of man! But what men? Gates Agar came back from that expedition with a weird metal booklet entitled "Comet-ramen Cabularia."

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It was written in a strange language so queerly like English, and yet so far from being English, that it was several years before he translated it as a timetable of interplanetary travel, with comets used as the high-speed "limiteds" between planets and other systems! Back in civilization, however, their photos of the ancient "tomb", had been scoffed at as fakes, their small artifacts as clever frauds, and their whole story rejected. Working alone, Gates obtained employment in an observatory and systematically gathered together all available information, photos, etc, on comets. Then he checked the data thus obtained with his "Cabularia" and found to his excitement that the movements agreed sufficiently to confirm the authenticity of the "Cabularia" as an actual timetable. Now he burned to prove it. It was several years, however, before opportunity presented itself. Agar hadn't intended to steal the space ship in which a wild-cat attempt was going to be made to reach Mars. But when he sneaked into it at night, and was discovered by the watchman, he was startled into detonating its rockets. The watchman was killed, and when Agar regained consciousness, he found himself in space in a rickety, unpredictable, unproven space ship. But he had his timetable, and his data, and he drove the ship to the approximate location of the next "cometram." But when the comet came, it was going too fast to catch. In despair, Agar fired his remaining rockets and blanked out again. When he came to, the comet was still receding, but more slowly. Eventually he discovered that he was actually in the grip of its gravitational field, and slowly he was drawn in toward it until his fuelless ship came to a gentle landing. Leaving the ship, he found the "depot" behind the huge metal door, and discovering that the way travelers spent the time between connections was under suspended animation, put himself into the cataleptic sleep. And it was 200 years later when June Tyne had awakened him. During his sleep, he had been the recipient of "dream records" which had given him an education far beyond anything any human of Earth had ever had, and many talents and much knowhow, even the ability of mental telepathy. Now he gave June Tyne a sample lesson, putting her to sleep for a short time. When she awakened, also able to read his thoughts, they searched for a way to return to suspended animation and to set the "alarm" Gates Agar had failed to set in his first sleep, which had caused him to miss many "connections" with cometrams. The alarm discovered, they entered into suspended animation, with many piles of "record discs" set to play back to them the knowledge of the ancient race that had devised this method of interplanetary travel. When the alarm awakened them,

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they found that their new mental ability told them they had a visitor. Outside, was a being not human. Slowly the great door opened, and something slithered, not walked, toward them. And as they waited for it to appear, they knew that it held one great hatred in its mind — for the white and foolish sons of men!

Now go on with the story:

THE creature who stood in the great outer doorway examining them was not frightening in appearance. But a cold chill ran down June's spine, and Agar could not restrain a shudder. It was something deeply buried, yet a thing that could never fully be hidden.

Not even in their newly acquired experience of the life-ways of so many planets was there anything to compare with the slender, graceful cylinder undulant above the gliding feet that were not feet, but sinuous jointless extensions of the brilliant flesh. The face was one pair of wide, liquid eyes, the lips a smile of mocking welcome, a superior smile that said without words: "What fools have we here?" The nose was an uplifted pug, conveying an almost ridiculous impression of overweening pride. The chin was a pointed, elfin rosy softness beneath the mocking smile. Its hairless scalp was smooth, brilliantly mottled skin, several colors all melting into each other indistinguishably.

Agar threw off his mental shock of revulsion and primal fear, tried to discipline his thinking by assuring himself that a being with such a large skull case could not be evil. That such delicate hands, and so many of them, with such evidently flexible digits, could not but be above violence and cruelty by reason of inherited culture patterns. But his mind kept talking back, saying: "It wears no clothing, so it has no moral sense! It carries its green leather case with every evidence of a cruel assurance that the case contains our undoing. The symbols on the case spell 'Spayderine', and you know that means one engaged in stamping out undesirable life."

Agar's heart gave a bound as he noted this last set of symbols, for he had learned that the Spayderines were an organization distinct from all government, separate and apart from all social life. Their lives were devoted to finding the destructive intent in the young, and either eliminating it by treatment and training, or removing that tainted individual from society. They were above laws, immune from legal prosecution, answering only to their superior officers in the Spayderine organization. It was the nearest thing to a priesthood the Elder world had contained.

"Now I understand," said Agar, smiling and extending his hand in greeting. "I assumed because your thought was hidden that we were

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going to receive an unwanted visitor, for the thought would be hidden only to conceal some evil intention. But now that I see you belong to the Spayderine monitors, I understand."

The creature shook his hand gravely, and then also shook June's hands, one at a time. "I know you are lost beings from a foul star . . ." it said orally, but simultaneously there was a lightning-swift mental exchange as it explained they used oral speech so that the custom did not die out, because of song and poesy and the many other beauties that existed only in the oral speech of a people. As they listened to its words, they knew it was sifting over their thoughts, looking for something they could not understand. Its thought raced ahead of its speech, as if to confuse them and betray them into some trap. And that strangely beautiful face never lost its serious expression, as if it were sorry to find such children as they upon this careening rock, for it *must* do its duty.

Agar listened, and tried very hard not to think the wrong thing . . .

"You come from a world long abandoned to the flames of the evil that sweep over it. You are members of a race condemned, denied the right to discover the very secrets you two have now discovered. I know you are here as much by fortunate accident as by design, but even so, our worlds are worlds of vast and ancient culture, our bloodlines are of the purest, from which the hereditary taint of evil has been wiped out by sanguine and heroic measures in the far past, and by eternal care today. You yourselves may not necessarily be evil, but your blood contains the taint of those who were long ago exiled to earth: *the Fallen Ones.*"

Agar saw the trap awaiting them now that it was too late. They had come this far only to be sent back! These ultra-purists, making a fetish of their age-old war with evil, would never allow life from Earth to enter their worlds!

They followed the solemn-faced creature from the cometram reluctantly, after it had drawn a weapon from his green leather "brief-case" and pointed it at them, letting them know they were under arrest.

"You will remain in custody until the council for transients have passed upon your case. Do not resist. It will automatically rule out any favorable decision."

As they boarded his ship, it rattled on: "Our worlds are good worlds where life is valued, but not valued so highly we cannot prune out our dead wood, nor destroy our destructives. Come, the ancient Cometram moves on its appointed round and we must waste no time, for time is life itself."

They were two sadly dejected mortals as they stood examining the sleek flying wing in which the Spayderine had come to the rock. June read Agar's dread of what was be-

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fore them and felt that he was only too right. It was no welcome for two voyagers who had come so far so perilously.

They followed the weird but beautiful creature onto the craft, noting it had already attached towing lines to the two ships from Earth. This seemed odd to Agar; the creature apparently had been certain it was going to arrest them.

They entered the craft from beneath. A light line dangling from the port allowed them to pull their nearly weightless bodies aboard. They had hardly taken seats in the control chamber, which was a blister on the top side of the wing, when it took off.

They swept along for several minutes at a speed acceleration told them was very great. As the pressure eased, they saw a vast disc ahead, turning slowly on its axis. It was quite smooth, its glittering surface unrelieved by any projections. Their guide landed gently on its surface, pulling their clumsy metal ships down by causing the tow lines to reel in. As he detached the lines, an opening appeared in the smooth surface beneath the entry port of the wing, and they drifted weightlessly down the guide line.

Within the great disc were objects now familiar to them, but which would not have been but for their sleep education.

Telecasters, solidographic projectors, telaugmentic mechanisms, thought-record libraries, duplicators, imagino-creators, record-file cabinets and augmentors lined the curved corridors along which they followed the gliding effortless rubbery limbs of their "host". The place seemed a museum or library, and much of the apparatus was very old and evidently well-used. Agar guessed that their host was a collector of antiques, or else that this disc was of equal age with the comet they had slept in. The equipment was lavish, and some was evidently new — it lay unused, its cables still unconnected.

"Here are your quarters—" breathed the creature, throwing open a door. As they stepped curiously inside, gazing about them, the door slid shut behind them and they heard the lock click.

AGAR turned to the door, rage rising in him, but there was not even a handle. The chamber was absolutely bare of furnishing; there was not even a couch or a chair. There were only four smooth metal walls and a floor. Light came from an unseen source overhead, seeming to stream equally from all four sides. A sob from June Tyne brought home to Agar the disappointment this reptilian thing with its green bag of tricks was to them. He took June in his arms, murmuring: "There, there, little girl, don't cry. There are more things in heaven than this one slippery Spayderine."

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"It's impossible he could belong to that ancient organization," June said, freeing herself and shaking aside her tears. "Everything in the records about them was good. They are the most respected and admired of all the many groups who try to keep their ways clean of the ancient taint. If that thing is a Spayderine, then the old ways are gone, and some corrupt modern thing has taken their place. The old names mean nothing!"

"That's what I think has happened," agreed Agar. "But it might be a good idea for us to figure a way of escaping before we get before a courtful of such slippery wigs as that one. They might condemn us to death just because earth was once a place where they exiled their criminals."

June squatted on the bare metal floor and leaned against the wall. "We're like a couple of kids who ran away from school and accidentally got into a post-graduate technical school."

"We are more like a couple of dark age people of Earth who were accidentally transplanted into modern New York—" Agar said.

June asked "My N'York or your New York?"

"Either one. Suppose a couple of peasants from the twelfth century got on a subway and got off at the end of the line. The gum machines, the candy vending machines, the penny-in-the-slot picture machines . . . they'd all be miracles to them. And the first slicker that came along and said he was ready to sell them the Brooklyn bridge would seem to them like the McCoy."

June clapped her hands in sudden decision. "That's exactly what Mr. Lizard Spayderine reminds me of —a smooth confidence man, some kind of crook who habitually pretends to be a pillar of rectitude. If he's a Spayderine, I'm a Chief Justice of the I.P. Supreme court!"

"But what does he figure on? How can he get a profit out of us? We haven't any money."

"Probably means to sell us down the river to some slaving gang. Maybe that's what this place is, an abandoned space station along the Cometram, taken over by some slave gang, and he is the local 'agent'."

"I think you've got it," agreed Agar. "But I don't see what we can do about it."

THEIR feelings about their host intensified as day followed day and the door was not unlocked. Neither was any food or water brought them.

"So we're from the banned area," growled Agar. "They don't have to starve us to death!"

June's eyes were often bright with tears. Her hopes had grown so great after she had learned about the ancient race from which Earthmen sprang. She had been so sure they would welcome them and teach them, give them of their endless wealth of know-how. "Earth has

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had such an ugly history, and so largely their fault," she said. "For such a long time they have shunned our old world, after dumping their unwanted on her for an age. It doesn't seem fair, to condemn the children, too."

Agar spread his hands in an acceptance of helpless defeat. "We have come a long way to learn that these great peoples practice such an unfair policy. I don't quite understand."

June did not hear him, lost in her own thoughts. "In the Bible, it says something I never could accept, too. 'The sins of the fathers . . .' even to the seventh generation! Remember?"

Agar's smile was a twisted bitterness on his lean face. "I've spent years of study, a lot of mighty hard work . . . only to learn the old race is not what it was . . ."

June broke in: "Two hundred years of listening to their thought records in your sleep — only to learn there is no hope for the people of Earth. If they progress, if they win wisdom, co-ordinate all their abilities in one great strength. . . . they would only be crushed back to earth again. No matter how they try, they will only be slaughtered again and again, just as the legends tell us they were in the past. Even the Bible tells of 'God' wiping the whole race off the face of the earth."

At her intense emotion, Gates clenched his fists in response. "If we could reach the right people out here, somebody really strong and genuinely beneficent . . ."

June shook her head, her voice sinking into a sorrowful defeat, then rising into angry scorn. "And tell them the truth about Earth? Would it change the ancient edict? Hardly!"

"Even in your day?" Agar raised his brows. "Is Earth still so corrupt? So worthless, deserving only annihilation from the good races of space? Don't you think they're a little blind to the beams in their own eyes, a little over-proud of their easy virtue, to condemn a whole race, a whole solar system? For over ten thousand years, the records relate, Earth has been the hated place, the place where no one wants to go, where they send their most feared criminals as the utmost in punishment."

Agar's voice faded, his eyes lost in thought. Then he suddenly leaped to his feet, his fist smacking into his palm. "That's what the chamber I found was! The home built for himself by one of their mighty exiles! I'll bet he found a way to use the cometrams for escape. That's why his place was littered with those scrolls of orbits. He was figuring a route by which he could avoid inspection. I'll bet he made it!"

June settled back against the bare wall. "Tell me more about that place—about the kind of person he must have been. So long ago, and

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so great and wise—I want to know if he was good, too? Such an edict betrays corruption in this space government—it's so unfair."

Agar took a little metal plaque from his pocket, handed it to June. She saw nothing on it for a second, then she realized it was like an electro-plate, and held it at an angle. From the surface glowed a radiant face, the strong, rather frightening face of an angel!

"A woman! *This*—is the one?"

"You think it's a woman? I wasn't sure. I decided it was possible for a man to be so beautiful, that no woman could look so powerful. You know, I translated her name. You'd never guess what it meant — say, you have the same name!"

June looked a question and Agar's voice sank into a strange note of awe, a terrific respect. "The name this star-roving creature bore was 'Sol-tyne.' I puzzled out the meaning from other texts there. The nearest we can come to it was "Sun-smith!" Can you grasp what that means?"

June was suddenly also on her feet, crying: "Now I see it!"

Agar, puzzled, asked: "S e e what?"

"The reason a woman with a face like that was marooned on Earth! Her inheritance of wisdom, her calling, her trade handed down from her forebears — was doctoring sick suns! She was in the business of making evil suns shine beneficiently! And because of the dangers of such work to their precious skins, they outlawed her! The scum . . ."

Agar shook his head dazedly. "You're way ahead of me. You know, your own name, 'Tyne', is *Eldermantic* tongue for Smith. You might be descended from just such a person."

June glanced again at the rather frightening beauty on the metal plaque, then turned it face down on the floor. "I hope so, but of course if Tyne meant Smith then they had as many Tynes in their phone book as we have Smiths in ours. I'd hate to be descended from the fearful lice who sentenced her. The same kind of deal they handed me in court, I can guess. I can just see it, a corrupted judge who hates every one young and alive, saying: "Because of activities hazardous to the health and the very existence of our peoples, you are condemned to the penal colonies of earth-planet, under Sol IX . . .'"

Agar, caught up in her emotion, if not in her line of reasoning, carried on in the same bitter tone: "And I can hear her answer: 'You are passing sentence on nuclear engineering of a high order of technical complexity. I doubt you or anyone present in this courtroom possesses the requisite training or mentality to pass on the point at issue.'"

June thrust her face almost into Agar's in her rapt immersion in her part: "You are in contempt! You

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have had every consideration, and the technical aspects of this case were handled in the case of Reg Sol-Tyne of the Merans versus the Unicourt of Bericault so that a precedent was established. There is no more to be said. Take her away."

Agar, wondering if they really understood what they were talking about, mused: "I still think the Sun-smith was a man, even if he was beautiful as a woman."

Suddenly they both whirled, searching the bare room with their eyes as a voice, sibilant, whispering, but right at their elbows, broke into their conversation.

"The Sun-smith was but a man, children of Earth. Some of you are very probably descended from him."

THEIR eyes gave up the useless search as they remembered that rays existed which pierced walls without hindrance, as well as miles of intervening rock or other walls . . . the voice might come from anywhere in the big disc, or from anywhere within many miles out in space. After a second of startled silence, they accepted the fact of a listening ray over which the voice was speaking, and almost together they chorused: "Who are you? Have you heard everything?"

The voice, hardly human in timbre, whispered in an accent heavy with strangeness, an alien voice speaking their own English tongue with an effort. Yet it was a voice that inspired admiration. They were conscious of a great strength and a deep awareness of power.

"Your talks together have been most interesting. I am a friend. We will have many talks together, you two lovers and myself, before we part. But for now, remember that I am a friend, and trust me, no matter what you may think. I am coming to release you."

The whisper died away, leaving them both unsure they had heard anything, wondering if they were not dreaming in unison. Minutes passed, long minutes of waiting, newly freighted with dread that something would happen to stop their release.

As the minutes grew, they tried to recapture their patience, tried to sleep . . . but they were more than ever conscious of their hunger and thirst.

"They look on us as a race of evil degenerates. I wonder if they have grown so soft and cowardly they are afraid to open that door and feed us."

June Tyne sank to the floor wearily. "I can believe it," she sighed. "Long ages of security, without danger of any kind, with machines to entertain them, robots and such devices to do all their work, they could be utterly without strength of character, without fibre, utterly soft and cowardly. That slinky thing that tricked us into this cell—didn't he strike you as a flunky type? A yes-man, distilled from generations of sycophantic forebears, yet quite

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unconscious of his own weaknesses? Perhaps that irridescence was not a patina of culture, but the irridescence of the slime of decay?"

Agar chuckled, knowing June hoped the creature was listening to them on a telaug ray. Gates began to beat upon the locked door in a frenzied attempt to awaken some answer. The locks suddenly clicked back. June sank weakly into Agar's arms, the strain suddenly overcoming her waning strength. Agar moved back from the door, holding her half unconscious form.

The apparition that stood there as the door finally swung inward caused him to back slowly across the cell until the wall stopped his retreat. June came to life in his arms, gave a scream of horror, and collapsed completely. But as she passed out, she managed one faint whisper that intensified the horror for Agar. "The Red Death!"

The thing that stood there was human in shape, but very tall. Its robes were black, and its face was a horrible scarlet caricature of the human. The thing opened its thin lips, where white and perfect teeth belied the horror of its face. The voice was a gentle whisper, with an undertone of sorrowful understanding that struck a responsive chord in Agar's breast.

"You see before you what the human race becomes when the Sun-smiths are forbidden to practice their ancient magic. However—"

The creature made a swift gesture, and the horrible scarlet skin peeled off in its hands, becoming a bit of elastic stuff dangling in the long red hands. "This ugly disguise was necessary to approach the monster who held you two here. It is not necessary now. Come, we have a long way to go."

A white tide of wonder and hope swept the Earthman at sight of the beauty beneath the red mask.

"The Sun-smith!" breathed Gates, too weak with hunger to be logical.

"Hardly," the tall being in the gloomy black robes answered gently. "But I am going to take you where you may meet a real Sun-smith, if not the same one whose portrait you bear. Their work is an ancient issue among our united races. Some theoreticians claim that any change in a sun's fire shifts the universal balance of energy exchange, and must of necessity cause catastrophic changes in other areas as the balance rights itself. But observation does not support the theory. Like all theories, it fails to meet the facts. But come along, there's no time for discussion. The Eel's companions may return at any time, and I for one do not want to meet them."

THEY followed him down several corridors, Agar supporting June's weakly tottering steps, and they entered the huge central chambers where the sleek creature who had trapped them had first admitted them. The tall figure in black paus-

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ed beside a still form on the metal floor looking down with a strange smile of triumph. Agar paused, peering, then recognized their captor lying stiff in death.

"He brought this on himself. No once can masquerade as one of the Spayderines and live. He was not too well informed, or he would never have used my stolen instrument case for a traveling bag."

"What sort of thing was he?" asked Agar, again following the tall black form, but with a grim certainty in his mind that this tall stranger had been in truth an angel of death for their captor. As the stranger made no answer, Agar asked again: "What was he up to, out here all alone in this disc?"

"He is typical of a class becoming far too numerous. They carry on an illegal trade of sorts, using the old cometram as a freight carryall. You happened to get in their way. They did not want you traveling about telling of their presence on the forbidden routes. He meant to let you starve, the simplest way of getting rid of you. In your world, I suppose you would call him a smuggler."

June, coming out of her faint, was sure she was seeing visions. She whispered to Agar. "See the halo around his head, just like in church?"

Agar, noticing it for the first time as they passed from the dimness of the disc upward to the surface, where the lights of the stranger's ship made the whole surface of the disc bright as day, wondered if there might not be some other explanation than the biblical one.

As they entered the ship waiting in the launching cradle, Agar recognized it. It was the same used by their captor, he would have sworn. Agar cast a glance at their rescuer and he nodded, flashing a brilliant smile. Their mental exchange, taking place in a fraction of a second, told him how the stranger had lain in wait on the disc, not even allowing a thought to trickle through his mind, until the serpentine individual now dead had been distracted from his watchfulness, then had flashed his beam weapon upon him and cut him down. All in that flash of exchange, Agar gathered the concept of ray warfare as the difficult thing it was, and the difficulties of stalking an enemy whose ray-sensitivity, augmented by the telaug receiver, could reach out for so many miles and pick out the slightest deviation from the utter silence of space. Yet the stranger had lain in wait, had caught him unaware, had managed to kill him. It could be done, but Agar could not quite accept the picture as he received it. It seemed out of character for this tall, smiling stranger to shoot a man in the back.

"Not this one," smiled their rescuer. "But he had a chance and he had his hand on his weapon. I gave him an equal break. I had to know certain things, and I learned

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them first, then I killed him. He has been an active assassin, and cleverly evaded every effort to bring him in, managing to elude every trap by masquerading as one of our order. But there's no time for all that. Strap in, we've got to leave this area as rapidly as possible, we are not out of danger yet."

Which was all Gates Agar and June Tyne heard for some time. The hand of a terrific acceleration squeezed the blood from their brains as their rescuer shot away from the disc.

IT was into a similar chamber in another cometram that the black angel carried them some hours later. It was so similar that as June awakened to drink the nutrient liquid Agar pressed to her lips, she was sure she had dreamed the whole incident of their arrival at a station. But as she lay back weakly after drinking, and her eyes wandered to the tall figure in black with the shining face, she put a hand to her mouth to smother the rising scream of fright, her eyes turning to Agar in terror.

"It's all right, darling," murmured Agar, his heart telling him nothing was so important as this brave little woman's well-being. "It's all right. Try not to think about it. Just sleep and get your strength back."

Reassured, she fell into a deep sleep. Gates turned to his strange new friend. "Now, I must have some understanding of this, so I can get some sleep myself. Who are you, why did you help us, where are we going?"

"There's plenty of time, Earth-child. I can tell you about it best while you sleep. Lie down under the recorder; it is identical with the one you used before. I will direct the record selection to give you the pertinent historical data, then I will make a tape to give you events up to date. When you wake up, you will know as much about it as I do. Sleep, friend. I didn't take the trouble to help you out of mere charity—I have a use for you. I can offer you a better fate than a return to Earth now."

Agar smiled ruefully. "From what I have learned, it seems anything is better than what we call life under Sol IX."

It was a long and arduous dream. A seemingly vast time the two lived under their benefactor's skilled manipulation of the sleep-teaching device. A time that stretched back to the days when Terra was a burnt ball of smoking earth, swept over by scorching blasts from a suddenly inflamed sun, with but a few hundred hardy humans clinging to life painfully at the poles and in the deep caverns into which the burning gases and smoke had not penetrated. It told of the coming of the sun-smith from the far edge of the galaxy, of his work as his followers dropped hundreds of cargoes of super-potent chemicals into the sun to

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quench its too rapid combustion—to convert its cycle of transmutation from extreme fission to a damped, slower cycle.

As the flames died, and Earth cooled, as the deep roots of the age-old redwoods pushed sprouts back to the light from the beds of ash that had protected them, as Earth's water began to condense from the stratospheric steam cloud, as the carpet of vegetation began its spread slowly south and north from the poles where some plants had lived through the holocaust—the Sun-engineers landed several ship-loads of colonists and archeologists to disinter and preserve the historical archives and records of scientific attainments of the vanished peoples.

But the survivors of those great vanished races had been through too much radiation, too many long years of terrible heat and utter privation. They were mad, but still had the use of the weapons left untouched by the flames. They attacked the colonists and slaughtered many of them, drove the rest back to space. These battles, small in numbers of combatants but terrific in intensity, came to the attention of the great law-creating bodies of the interlocked empires of deep space. They took it as the archtype of several disputed cases involving the work of the sun-smiths, and named it "The inevitable result of interfering with the normal balance of interplay between integration and disintegration in the universe." They sentenced the sun-smith responsible for the work to the world he had resurrected from death under the flames of Sol IX.

"If your work is worthy, you should welcome life under the rays of your creation," had been the so-wise decree. The judges had turned a deaf ear to the Sol-tyne guild's defense: that their work was incomplete and experimental and could not be abandoned at this early stage, as the sun might retrograde and affect the life under its rays adversely.

So Agar and June came to understand why life on their world was as it was, corrupt with evil, short of duration, unhappy for everyone. And they understood, too, that the source of that evil was an unjust decree by a too-powerful tribunal whose members had no interest in the few scattered survivors on Earth.

Then they lived through the long ugly centuries of Earth's growth and the periodic devastations of the growth. The floods and sun-bursts of heat that repeatedly set back the struggling human race. They saw how the heat of the irregularly flaming sun sent the water into the air. As the heat receded slowly, through long lush periods of re-growth, how it inevitably came down again in endless rains that deluged the whole face of the planet.

But the ugliest crime against the people of Earth, they learned, was the custom of sending the most feared and sadistic of the criminals of the

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great space empires to it. These evil beings, often wealthy, lords with numerous followers sharing their exile, were set loose upon Earth equipped with all the skill and ability to manufacture weapons that had sufficed them to defy for a time the great power of the age-old empires. Condemned to Earth for life, they raged, because on Earth their life-span was shortened to a fraction. These criminals, making themselves the overlords, by their rule destroyed all the advances the race had made, for their will was to confine all knowledge to their favored few. It was these criminals who condemned the people of Earth to utter ignorance. Building anew in the ancient caverns originally bored by the dying elder race to escape the increasing heat of the sun, they ruled secretly and terribly, hiding their evil from the casual inspection of the Space Patrols by keeping the surface people in ignorance even of the existence of the ancient caverns.

Then the dark-robed figure with the angel's face brought his guests' dreams up to the present time, showing how the old comet-trams came to be abandoned through all the area around Sol IX, because so many were captured and held by the secret subterraneans of Earth, nearly impregnable now in their deep hiding places. How Earth itself was finally forgotten as the area was banned, listed as unsafe for travel of any kind.

AS they awoke, it was to hear the Spayderine's deep gentle voice saying: " . . . as it is today, unfit for any of the ancient blood to inhabit. A crime against our race, committed long ago, and repeated again and again as the edicts were renewed by a tribunal made up of representatives from many races of space. We of the old race from which you sprang have often planned to right the ancient wrong. But tampering with a sun's fire is still forbidden. An obsolete law, yet still it was beyond our strength to risk the work because of the wars that could ensue if the work went wrong. To help Earth, we have to break the universal law established by the Unicourt, a vast body of representatives from a tremendous area of space, too great in potential power for any one race to face in battle."

His smile was somehow terrible as he gazed away from their awakened eyes to some scene in his own mind—his voice still gentle but so full of threat for someone they knew not.

"However, the path to that long-planned work lies over the dead bodies of certain beings who have become active enemies of our well-being. Which means, children, that Earth today has powerful allies she never had before. Things are going to be different, as you would say."

The ancient cometram swung on its eternal predetermined round, the mighty gyro humming in perdurable

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bearings, the mighty machinery built to last virtually forever holding the great rock to its route as firmly as steel tracks set in bedrock. Days later they swung aboard the "stolen" ship from the disc station, and jetted off toward a brighter point in the golden star-pattern wheeling about them.

The brighter point proved to be an emerald-hued sun, vastly growing before them, and about it wheeled a dozen visible planets. Agar guessed that with so many plainly visible there must be dozens more in larger orbits too far off to be noticed at this distance.

"This is a planned planetary system," explained their mentor, "constructed an age ago. The sun itself was grown from a seed, in empty space, where only quiescent ash-drifts existed before. Once it was a tiny cold bit of matter, possessing a unique power of choice in its magnetic fields. This choice was inbuilt (an impressed magnetic field) which caused the integrative processes which build up all matter to select the desired atoms and nucleii and protons. Just as the magnetic fields you know will select iron and let pass sodium and other metals, so this seed attracted the desired materials to build into its elements. As it grew at an accelerated rate, it became a potential sun, and was eventually set afire by a nuclear engineer to create from it the best of all possible sun types. Then the seeds that had been similarly planted about the sun and were now great heavy bodies, true planets, became warm and the colonies which had been also selected and fitted for the work of building a world landed upon their new homes."

Agar could hardly accept his words, and emitted a sound of disparagement. "No, I can't believe it!"

The man smiled. "There were mighty beings in the past. It could well be that such work is not possible today, and it could as well be that there is more of it done today than then, so long ago. It is nevertheless accepted among us, the formulae and entire procedures are known to us as well as the names of the engineers who set the work afoot, though they never expected to live to see its completion. Our sun and our planets are a result of planned integration in empty space, where no matter existed before the work began."

June nodded. "It is taught in our Bible that the sun and the earth were built by a God—but it says it was done in seven days."

"Your Earth, and your Sun?" asked the dark robed one. But he did not wait for an answer. "It could well be true. In that case, the flare-up of your sun that began the trouble must have been the result of a plot, an enemy succeeding in destroying a whole planet densely peopled!—Such a one as we face today in our attempt to undo some ancient wrongs."

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Agar gasped, glimpsing the vastness of such work through limitless time. "You mean there are many worlds in space that were grown, as jewel-makers grow their crystals in a solution?"

"Precisely. There are always scouts out in their long-range craft, testing out the currents in space and charting the focii of the forces of integrance, and at the focii, the vortices and whorls of these vast tides, they plant prepared bits of matter. For at such points the ash that permeates all space is particularly dense and integration takes place at a more rapid pace. It is done because it is a fact that at such points in space life itself, which is also a form of integration, takes on a more vivid and beautiful growth, and becomes something more than the existence that is called life at other points in space."

Agar turned, his eyes sweeping the wheeling star points as their craft's prow turned toward the speeding planet ahead to match its course. To know that matter is a precipitate of space, just as salt on a sea shore is a precipitate of seawater was a big thought to absorb, yet it was so very obvious. The origin of all worlds was of course this same steady precipitation! And the ancients knew far more than that; they used it to cause the kind of matter they preferred to grow into their future suns, their future homes. They planned and set into action immense selective magnetic fields to provide their future homes with every needed metal and basic material! He saw the green sun ahead, and the greatness of such work overwhelmed him. What manner of creature lived so long as to plan so far ahead? And he heard the whisper of his new friend in his mind, answering. "The race itself is that creature, Earthman."

AGAR could not help a glow of pride as his mind provided the inferred: "And you are one of that race!" so that he was not sure if he heard it or thought the words himself.

The thought of their host went on ahead of his own, leading him to see that even the vortex in space which caused the accelerated precipitation of matter was created by the engineers of the past. That such a planned sun could never become harmful to the life under its rays, for the heavy metals which caused harmful radiations were never allowed to form in the core. The real mothers of a race are those women who bore the great engineers who started those suns agrowing long ago. The source of our greatness is the existence of such suns, for life is vastly mightier under the rays of a sun so beneficient.

June, her eyes misted over with the inward vision of such a race drawn for her by the telepathic powers of their new friend, exclaimed: "The thought of the long ages

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of time past, the inheritance of such wealth, makes me beg for some of that wealth? Let me store in my little mind just a few of those mighty thought-records they must have left to you? There must be some cherished bits of their own original thought left you? Surely?"

The tall being, still in his black robes, gave her one of his rare smiles. "My name is Ahvanyi. In my home are family heirlooms, collections of the most potent of those great ancients' thought. It is fitting you should begin your education with the study of the early records. I will see that you have that gift from our past."

Agar asked: "Ahvanyi is your family name, the name of some of those who made those records?"

As the man nodded, Agar whistled to himself. "Whew, that's really tracing back to the Mayflower!"

At length their little flying wing settled to a landing upon a great platform in space, so far above the cloud-wreathed world below that they could make out no details clearly. The two earthlings found themselves unexpectedly the focus of interest. Dozens of dark-eyed, shapely maidens interviewed Agar for their news broadcasts, and he felt the pangs of jealousy as he noted that little June was herself the center of a laughing group of reporters, all male.

They had to undergo a severe series of medical tests to determine what disease organisms were present in their bodies, and to eliminate them. Then they had to undergo immunization injections to protect them from those diseases prevalent on Mera, for those organisms not found in their bodies.

The two people from Earth were vastly interesting to the citizens of the planet-state Mera, because Earth was well known to them in legend as "the world of the damned", and they were somewhat surprised that Gates and June did not possess any particular marks betraying their life of violence on Earth, or any outstanding traits of malevolence.

The Mervani were a beautiful race, graceful beyond belief. That they were the original parents of some of Earth's races was hard to accept, because of their larger brain cases, long bone structure, and their quickness and joyousness. The lightning of ultra-rapid thought exchange playing forever between them gave them an alien air hard to accept as really human in nature.

The two were asked many questions about earth, but their answers invariably brought laughter or an unbelieving stare. The Mervani just could not accept or understand life on Earth. Agar and June themselves had great difficulty accepting the facts of life as the Mervani saw them.

WHEN Ahvanyi finally came for them, they were glad to get out of their fishbowl and into privacy again. Ahvanyi led them

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into a little craft that might have been cut from a ruby, for its appearance was that of a thing cast from gleaming plastic, all in one piece. June was breathless in anticipation, especially after the marvelous mechanisms and perfect appointments she had seen in the space platform. Agar was enrapt in the scenery spreading out beneath, ever wider in perfectly contoured slopes and fields and regularly spaced structures whose purpose he could only guess. The lack of close groups of the structures told him there were no cities, betrayed an agricultural economy—which was not what he had expected.

Ahvanyi, catching his thought, explained. "We evolved from the city state an age ago. Now every Mervan family is completely self-sustaining and independent. If every Mervan family but one perished tonight, that one could go on just as before, having everything it needs on its own farm. We have no need of factories such as exist on your worlds, our soil-culture does not depend upon machines or manufactured fertilizers. We are in accord with nature, not at war with her. Most of our crops are tree crops, and our heritage of intelligent land care has given us trees free of blights and insects, a soil entirely self-sustaining. Our only work is pruning, mulching, and replanting occasionally where some accident has caused a casualty in the ranks of bearing trees."

Agar looked skeptical. "No corn, no wheat, no oats!" "No cabbages, no onions . . . ?" cut in June, interested and also skeptical.

Ahvanyi laughed. "For every fruit you eat and many more, we have an equivalent. You eat wheat in bread, we cultivate a breadfruit. You raise cabbages, we raise a similar thing in a perennial form. This planet is like some of your tropical countries, in which the jungle can provide most of men's needs, if they let it. We let it, even encourage it to do so."

Agar asked: "It seems to me that your numbers would outgrow such a method of life. That cities would form themselves inevitably, in spite of any effort to prevent it."

"Long ago our race learned there is no virtue in numbers for the sake of strength. We raise men and women, not armies. And we do a good job. You would be very surprised at the abilities of these people.

"But—now we are going to land near the home of a pioneer of space, a very old man. Among the Mervani, a man is not old until he passes the thousand mark in your years."

"He is one who has traveled to Earth, long ago?" guessed June, watching the ground rush up to them.

"He is one who traveled for centuries among the planets, searching out the secrets left by such as your sun-smith. He knows Earth, yes. He will make you welcome as his guests, just as he himself was made

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welcome in many places on his travels. You need not fear you are not wanted; he will be interested in what you can tell him of your Sun-smith. He may even make one more trip, to the place where you discovered the cometram orbit schedules."

Agar murmured: "It is hard for us to think of lives in terms of ten centuries of activity . . ."

"That shortness of your life is the very point at issue between ourselves and the central governing body of the galaxy. It is a direct result of their interference with the work of the sun-smiths long ago. Many other planetary systems have retrograded from the same cause—their edict forbidding tamper with a sun, any sun. It will inevitably lead to a galaxy-wide conflict, a war that will make all other wars fade into squabbles, by comparison. And that, soon!"

The little ruby craft sat down upon a flower-strewn grass expanse before a huge and evidently very old stone structure, resembling a great school or hall to their Earth eyes. As they left the plane and walked across the grass toward the place, Agar gave a little "Hmm . . ." as he noticed the stones of which it was constructed had no seams, but must have been cast in place or cut from one small mountain of solid rock. He glanced at Ahvanyi, but got no answer. As they passed under the huge carved portico, he saw no seam of joining anywhere, which was somehow inexplicable, for it was so evidently genuine rock and no amalgam from man's hand.

"The owner, whose name is Ahvanyi also, is an ancestor of a round thousand of our families. He is a kind of living heirloom, and is somewhat unpopular with many of his descendants, for he has strong ideas about the way our life trends away from the original ideas of his contemporaries. And to my mind, he is right and his opponents wrong. We are getting off the trail, going in for sybaritic dilettante-ism, to put it in Earth language. But he will probably be more understandable to you than to his own people—and he will probably like you better than his own progeny."

THEY followed Ahvanyi into the strangely beautiful pile, a massive thing, thrusting from a hillside of which it had once been in truth a part. Twined with vines as it was, half hidden by the tremendous trees, they received an impression of awful age and immutable strength beneath the graceful tracery of stone exterior.

They passed directly into a long gloomy chamber and found themselves before a score of large bodied oldsters, seated about a massive round table built of three-inch planks, dark wood that itself spoke of age. Gates was reminded of King Arthur's round table, though none of the giant beings seated there wore armor. They were far too massive

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f limb and wide of face even for rthur's lusty time. But that was he atmosphere, of a vested nobility, ld and wise in the ways of power, eated to consider some knotty roblem of suzerainty. The great aces, like idealized sculptures, vatched the two Earthlings for a ong moment without betraying any eaction by so much as the lift of n eyelash. Agar's mind was be- umbed by the realization that here vas the proof of Ahvanyi's careless tatement that the Mervani often assed the thousand year mark in ge. The proof was in the size of hem, the experience of the centur- es gazing gravely from their wise yes, the scars of time and warfare n their brawny bared arms. There vas every evidence before him in heir perdurable flesh and unyield- ng bones, upright and unbending acks, pillaring necks balancing the reat heads in perfect poise—but it vas their great hands outspread on he heavy amber-dark wood of the ncient table top, itself scarred by s long a span of years, that spoke nost of the passage of time. Agar ulped loudly, and was struck with is first stage fright, he who had earded the professors in their anctuaries with the utmost disre- pect, was here struck dumb before rue wisdom.

The atmosphere was tense as at council of war, one felt it like tangible pressure, and Agar felt ike a character in a fantasy who as stepped from a futuristic land- scape redolent of Utopian perfection into a feudalistic scene of gigantic strife.

But there was left him no time for such thought. That first im- pression of a gathering of kings and lords met to plan a campaign was his last thought entirely his own— for Ahvanyi put his hand on Agar's shoulder, and a hand on June Tyne's arm, and all those wise eyes swung to a focus upon the two from Earth, and each of those mighty old minds, inadvertently, perhaps, reached out to probe into their two minds simultaneously, tasting of their inward essence of self—and then left them devastatingly alone again, but not the same! They heard their guide speaking.

"I have had the good fortune to rescue these two mortals from cap- tivity. You know my pursuits. I was at the end of a long trail, and found my quarry had imprisoned these two adventurous children. They are natives of Tellus, now called Earth. The dispute and quandary that brought you all together today in an attempt at co-ordination against our common enemies began long, long ago when the Ahtor-Van Sol-Tyne set out to rehabilitate Sol IX. This sun had run wild as in- ward fires supposedly reached un- known veins of fissionable metal. These are the children of the sur- vivors of that terrible time, a race long ago condemned by the action of that body from which you are considering withdrawal."

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There was a silent chorus of strong mental exchange, crackling lightning-swift about their heads. Agar and June Tyne quailed as the powerful thought symbols crashed against the inner picture screens of their minds, and they found only a wild disorder in their own thoughts desperately attempting to follow the complex thought coursing about and through them.

Ahvanyi held up a hand to bring silence, and again they experienced the disquieting cessation that held so much of strength and knowing, yet said nothing. Ahvanyi spoke orally, so that they could follow. "Earth has a legend that their sun was constructed by a god, as was its planets. If it *had* been so built, it would have continued beneficent! I have a strong suspicion that that legend is true! I think that their sun was caused to expand by a secret plot, by parties who wanted to take over the great rich cavern homes of that mighty race of the Menti, the Elder great who lived on Earth before the fiery holocaust. If that occurred, as it well could have occurred, it follows in my mind that the same parties who caused that murder of a mighty people were the same group who caused the edict against the Sol-Tyne guild to be made a universal law. We can know this dread fact for a certainty by a simple search of the still extant records of the court procedure during the discussions as that law was being put on the Unicourt's books. If, as I have already surmised, the same group of creatures were responsible for our own differences with the Unicourt—that fearful group of ancient murderers may cause the same fate to overtake us that overtook another branch of the Mantic, the Elder race of Earth!"

Agar put both hands to his head as a storm of lightning-swift mental exchange swept about him, for hearing their thought was actual pain. June leaned against him weakly, and her expression of mental agony must have registered on the gathering, for silence again swept down. Then one spoke orally from that background of giant faces.

"What you're pointing out is that we are faced with a situation similar to that which caused the downfall of Sol IX, long ago. Why do you assume that the same oldsters are still alive and still planning to wreak the same kind of vengeance against all who resist their will? We have no men among us that old."

Ahvanyi moved forward, leaned over the edge of that sturdy table, his words whipping at them with a snap. "The tradition of that secret group of plotters *has lived*, the power itself *has lived*, and trouble for all the lesser members of the Unicourt *has sourced* from that same group! It is not necessary for its motivations to stem from the identical individuals. You know the *law of patterns-repeat!*"

There was a rumble of movement,

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of anger, and of a kind of sensing of terrible peril.

"Aye," one great greybearded fellow spoke out in a harsh dialect, "in nature the patterns of like repeat into like, that we know. I'll have the case scanned, and an analysis made."

Ahvanyi said: "I have already had the case scanned. My sources are unimpeachable, the Spayderines' secretarial body itself checked my findings and stamped a 'Probable Recurrence' on the pattern of activity I pointed out as sourcing in *the Valudin overlords!* They also unbent to tell me something I had not guessed. For many a long century, the Valudin lords have journeyed to certain pleasure-cities hidden from all others. Where do you think those palaces of secret sin are located?"

The oldster shook his shaggy great head, and his wide scarred hands made a gesture of dismissal. But Ahvanyi made his point in a voice that rose to a shout. "They are located in the Elder caverns of Earth! They have kept the surface of Earth in complete ignorance of the Elder works in order to have them all to themselves! They have caused the whole area of space to be forbidden to other travelers, while they themselves have made a vile den of license out of the greatest tomb in existence. And their own overlords were originally responsible for the sudden expansion of Sol IX. A very mild expansion, as you may not know, so much so that the molten depth was but a few feet, and the great redwood forests of ancient Earth put out new shoots from original roots. It was fire that reached only to a planned intensity, just enough to destroy all life on the planet, but not to destroy their mighty under-earth constructions. They caused the law against sun-tampering to be passed in order that our own Sol-Tyne guilds would not discover the ugly truth!"

A mild womanish voice broke in and Ahvanyi straightened and stepped back. The two earthlings, looking at him, felt that he would say no more to that gathering. The woman was saying: "The Elder race of Earth belonged to our own race-group in the courts. After their passing, the Mervani have lacked the necessary number of representatives to get a favorable vote in the general assembly. In all that passed time, we have not managed to gain one new concession from the Unicourt. It is surprising that we never guessed how it came about that our power died with the Elders of Earth."

Other voices suddenly asked: "Could not all this be purely assumption and conjecture, and no truth in it? Can we ever be sure that the Valudin overlords would vandalize a whole planetary system, slaughter every inhabitant . . . ?"

June Tyne suddenly stepped forward from Agar's arms, and with a flushed face and with her eyes on the floor, said loudly, with an effort

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overcoming shyness: "It is written in our oldest book that our Lord God destroyed all flesh from the face of Earth! The majority of our people believe the ancient cataclysms of fire and flood were brought down upon them by a God's hand."

"A strange God to worship . . ." commented someone, in an inference they didn't quite follow. Later Agar deduced that this inference was that the worship of such a destructive God had been the work of the underdwelling Valudin plotters.

The graybeard summed up: "What all this means to us is that we can expect a secret attempt to cause our own sun to expand suddenly the very day that we announce our withdrawal from the roles of the Unicourt supporters. Forewarned-is forearmed! I say it's sense!"

AHVANYI ushered them out of the quietly seated giants' presence with a gesture, and June whispered to Gates: "To look at them, they aren't saying a word, but oh, that complicated flow of thinking passing between them!"

Agar smiled and squeezed her waist. "They make me think of the Aesir, stormy yet mild, warlike, yet peaceful, and so big and brawny and so evidently old. How old are they, Ahvanyi?"

"My family name is Ahvanyi, but my friends call me Palan. You may call me that, too. There are a great many Ahvanyi's among us. That greybeard is Rurgen, the man I brought you here to meet. But as you see, he's occupied . . ."

As they moved down the long corridor toward the rear of the great structure, they could still hear the powerful discussion in thought: "The Valudin must have the secrets of the Sol-Tynes of old time. There must have been a Valudin member of the Guilds of that day, whose existence has since been blotted from the records!"

"They may even now be planning to take over our worlds in the same way. Now that you speak of it, they have enlarged their territory several times in recent centuries, and always because of some upflare of a sun. It is odd they would move into the rays of an unstable orb so confidently, if they had no information secret from others. It is all rather obvious."

"Now that it's pointed out . . ." they could hear old Rurgen rumble, and vision his beard curling angrily. They knew that their friend Palan Ahvanyi was delighted with the results, and as they stepped into an elevator and found themselves descending down and down into the earth, they forgot the recent trying ordeal before the eyes of those mighty old giants of this race in a wonder at Ahvanyi's destination.

They stood so close in the elevator cage, they could hear Ahvanyi's mind racing. "I had to tell them, so they could protect themselves and guard their sun. But it's really a job for the Spayderines. I only hope we

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:an spot the source of the motivation. n time to turn the thing away from he Mervani . . . " and Agar suddenly realized something he knew he was ıot to know. This friend of theirs vas not one of the Mervani, but an ıgent . . . for another race!

But he was abashed as an instant ater he heard Palan's thought-voice :orrect his assumption. "Not for ınother race! For another great ɔower for good, and one much better ɔrganized for action."

"I know you belong to this Spayderine organization." June's eyes on Palan's were puzzled. "Don't those ɔig-wigs upstairs know your connections?"

Palan smiled. "Due to your origins you could not know our customs. None ever mentions the Spayderine organization in public except under special conditions of extreme urgency. And none ever mentions they know that another belongs to the organization. It is more than a custom, it is all that ordinary people can do to aid us in our work. One may know that someone is connected to us, but one may not ever say so. In your case, you could not know. But try never to mention us. You may know the Spayderines exist, but you never saw one."

"How does one go about joining such a secret society?" asked Agar, his eyes trying to fathom the strange man's smiling depths.

"In your case, I think you will learn very soon. For the ordinary individual, only by invitation."

THEIR destination, as the elevator finally came to a stop, they found to be another vast chamber, with peculiarly styled appointments of an entirely different sort. To Agar's quick deductive faculties, the place was something even older than the great old palace above and had been similarly carved out of living rock, except that it had been done deep down in the bed rock. The furniture was rugged and simple, some of it gleaming metal upholstered in plain leather, some of it massive wooden construction. The Mervani taste seemed to run to durability in furniture. They found themselves again facing a gathering of folk much larger than normal to Earth. These people did not seem of the same era as those above, and seemed to speak and think in slightly different idiom, so that they were both at a loss whether these were members of the Mervani or not. They found themselves seated at a long bench by a table, and they were not alone, for a half-dozen others sat at the table. Their attentions were directed toward a speaker who stood at the head of a larger board in the center of the room. Agar noted that there were several wearing the same black robes as had their friend Palan.

Agar suddenly noted that a part of the gathering he had taken to be present was in reality a three dimensional projection of the chamber they had just vacated above, and that the people at the big table were those above not present in reality. The pro-

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jections were so perfect he could not tell which was here and which was there, and there was no dividing line—he only detected the thing because several of the black robed figures walked right through the table and the people.

The huge dim chamber they were all watching was suddenly still and silent again, and became an unreal place to him as his eyes adjusted to the slight diffusion of the edges of the projected figures. But still the two from Earth felt the air of ancient mythical powers clothed here in flesh, so that both of them felt there was some fantastic dimension beyond life opening before them, a place they knew about from old tales, and a little thrill of superstitious fear now and again chased down their spines as some chance word or impossible fact rang the bell of childhood memories so that the old tale's power was renewed, and they felt something of the magic of childhood's beliefs well up in them.

The speaker in the projection was saying: "These 'evil' descendants of an ancient crime against their forebears have shown themselves to us. We looked into their minds and know them to be sane, well balanced and courageous children of whom any of us could be proud. Yet the Unicourt has forbidden their people, the people of a whole planetary system, all opportunity, all succour of any kind—has condemned them to an existence futile in the extreme. These people of Earth are what our future descendants will be if the Valudin schemers have their way with us. They are blood brothers of ours, descended in truth from the same original racial stock. We think them puny and stupid, perhaps, but remember they are only so because of a crime which was committed while our own forebears closed their eyes to the truth and accepted a dastardly lie rather than face war. I say our own forebears must have glimpsed something of the truth and chose to ignore it. We cannot know all the circumstances now—but we can take measures to see the same thing doesn't occur again in *this* area."

Another voice at the table took up the speaker's work, and Agar wondered they did not use their thought exchange instead of oral speech, deduced that there were those present of foreign customs, only able to follow the thought if in slow motion such as oral speech entailed.

"The male from Earth has, unaided by any other mind, managed to decipher a volume of the 'Cometram Cabulare' and by the data he uncovered managed to vault across the heavens alone! He has slept for two centuries under the narco-rays of the obsolete Cometram nirvana system. During that time he has absorbed absolutely the whole library of sleep-teaching with which they were equipped when the rocks were orbited."

Some other at the table gave a sudden laugh. "The condemned pariah from Earth could probably by now outdo our own youths of two hundred

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years in a test for encyclopedic knowledge. The old records wre thorough jobs of their kind!"

Another deep bass voice rumbled: "This discussion about the two small ones from Earth only convinces me of the truth of the whole fantastic conjecture. Even without waiting for a confirmation from the archive authorities,I'd say it would be smart for us to set a fleet on guard about our good green sun. The time seems ripe for trouble with the Valudin. We have been expecting a move from them. Now we know their pattern! They will strike first at our sun. We cannot wait!"

QUITE suddenly the projection disappeared from the chamber, and the room they were in seemed to shrink on itself to half its seeming size. There were but six of the dark-robed men present, and Agar noted they looked up to Palan as the solid-ograph faded out.

His words were bitter. "We cannot risk open action against them! Any knowledge of our intent would precipitate their ancient plan into instant execution. The creatures behind such deeds are not ordinary men! I doubt if this group (the Mervani) is advanced enough to take them on! We cannot wait for the central committee of Spayder to appoint appropriate agents. We will have to make an attempt to strike the head off the Valudin serpent, and if one of us is caught, he must die before they learn we are from Mera."

Agar suddenly stood up. He found the grave, dark eyes of the half-dozen tall men upon him, and he felt their minds open to him silently, receptive, kind, wondering—felt a sudden warmth that he should be thus received.

"I want to suggest that perhaps the head you seek is not to be seen as head in the Valudin cities. On Earth, our governments are all supposed to be virtuous and beneficent, yet we have continual warfare and utter corruption, and the leaders are always far from the scenes of action, in a safe and impenetrable seclusion. They are never exposed. They are never the titular heads of anything publicly. I would suggest that perhaps the source, the moving spirit of this thing you want to scotch before it strikes, might be found on Earth, in those same pleasure-palaces deep in Mother Earth's rock."

Palan smiled, and his eyes swept their calm faces, as he checked his companions' reactions mentally. One by one they nodded, though Agar nor June could follow the ultra-rapid thought exchange.

Palan turned to Agar and June. "If we do go to Earth, you will go along. You could be a great help to us. But first, we have to contact certain distant operatives who may be able to make certain of your guess as to where we should look for our serpent's head."

June whispered to Gates. "You shouldn't! How do you know these

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Valudin people are what they assume, or that they will not be found in the Valudin centers. It seems to me they would be found just behind the nerve centers of their people's strength, with their fingers pulling the strings . . . "

Agar shook his head, his eyes on June's, knowing there was nothing now but to wait the decision of Palan and his comrades. "The trail will begin on Earth, for we are looking for a group who know how to upset a sun, a forbidden knowledge, and there is a chance the trail will end, too, on Earth, for there are things on earth that would not be if there were not powerful agencies at work unknown to we of the surface people. I know next to nothing about their problem, but I'm willing to bet my right arm they will find Valudin ships of war on earth! One reason, June—Earth lies between Mera and Valudin."

"Their natural outpost! I see what you mean, now!"

"I wonder how a sun-smith goes about changing the character of a sun?" mused Gates. "I suppose there must be potent catalysts, things that speed up the transmutation, cause a more rapid fission. But the mass of a sun . . . It would seem too great a job to throw in enough, even of a potent catalyst, to affect a thing as great in size as a sun."

June laughed, as if he had said something amusing: "We learned something, in our day, that yours didn't know. Your astronomers computed the mass of the sun from incorrect observations. Their lines of sight were taken below the atmosphere, and the results they swore by were tremendously erroneous. The sun is not nearly so huge as they estimated, and it is not nearly so far from Earth as they thought. So if you had the correct figures on the size of the sun taken from actual close-up observation in space, the problem of influencing the fire of the sun would not seem to be too big."

Agar gave her a slightly nettled look, then laughed too. "I remember now! In my new education from the records, I had a hard time accepting their figures on astronomical distances and sizes; they were so diminutive compared to the vast light-years and multitudinous diameters our astronomy taught. Our Earth was supposed to be the size of an orange compared to a sun the size of our Earth. That's a lot of diameters."

"The whole of astronomy underwent a conceptual revolution when men finally reached space and began to see things with straight lines. The atmospheric bending of light rays had thrown all the oldtimers into a mass of error."

Agar chuckled as he imagined certain professors forced to accept the fact of complete astronomical error . . . "How they must have burned when they finally had to jettison their whole science!"

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"There was a kind of revolt took place. The spacemen had to recruit a group of scientists sworn to uphold the actual truth, and build a new set of text books from scratch. They had to do it, to navigate at all. For years there were two sets of figures, the true and the old fallacious ones, and each set had their adherents. It was very confusing in the schools that tried to teach both sets. It seems funny now."

"I wonder if when this is over the Valudin will find themselves the pariahs, living in a forbidden area of space, cut off from all intercourse with other space cultures? It would be justice, but would it be justice for the innocent lowly people of their worlds?"

"Hardly," murmured June. "Two wrongs . . . "

"I hope they never condemn a people for the punishment of a few plotters. This Unicourt is obviously a body of deluded people led by the nose by a few powerful nations' representatives. We centainly had enough examples of that sort of thing back on Terra. Remember the history books telling about the Soviet United Republics who slavishly obeyed every signal from the Central power of their Soviet."

"Forget about the Mervan politics," whispered June. "Here comes Palan with a set of charts. I'll bet he plans on jetting off within hours."

BUT Palan of the Ahvanyi was not planning that. Instead he burst out: "Our guardships, dispatched only an hour ago, have discovered alien craft near our sun! They fled immediately they sighted our fleet, but what have they already done? Mervan may even now be doomed . . . as well as Pallas, Merthine, the other nine planets! We've got to catch those ships, learn what has been done, so their work may be counteracted!"

Agar did not even rise at the news. "Can't your sun-smiths deduce what they have done by spectroscopic analysis? From their knowledge of how such sabotage would be done, why can't they apply neutralizing re-agents anyway? Would such work also upset the sun?"

Palan, hurrying on through the room, said: "Come on, we're going to trail those ships, run one of them at least to cover. We can't dump damping re-agents into a sun unless activators have been dumped. They would cause a cold wave, freeze our food-bearing plants. This is a tropical agriculture. Are you coming, or staying?"

They both followed as he broke into a run, hard put to keep up with his long legs. In minutes they were aboard his little ruby plane splitting the air at supersonic speed toward a rendezvous with his comrades of the secret Spayderine Corps.

THE scene as their single Spayderine warcraft neared the emerald sun called Sol XIM was in-

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describably awe-inspiring. Thousands of the Mervan craft had deployed in a grid completely engloбing the vast mass of green fire; a feat that no person who had not seen it could imagine taking place. The craft, huge in themselves, were surrounded by a glowing heat-repellant force-screen, insulating them from the terrific radiations. This glowing screen extended for many miles—Agar guessed thirty to sixty miles, though it could have been much more—so that the sun seemed suddenly to have given birth to a multitude of tiny children, to be surrounded by them. These craft were many thousand miles distant from each other, but the distance was spanned by glowing beams, rendered visible by the fluorescing radiations of the sun, so that visible communication beams and tractor beams linked each craft in the grid. Now and again from one or another of the ships tiny black objects were ejected, which were drawn instantly down by the vast gravity of the mass beneath, flashing downward at visible speed for a second, then disappearing as their fall became more rapid than eye-vision. Agar guessed these objects were either test instruments, which gave off tell-tale signals to the technicians aboard the ships, or contained chemicals which by their reaction with the sun's fire would tell them whether sabotage had yet been committed.

Palan's craft flashed around the sun, outside this titanic grid of effort and defense, and on the far side a glowing beam suddenly lashed out toward them, so that they spun madly in seeming attempt to dodge. But as Agar and June clutched at their seat guards to prevent pain from the maneuver, they saw it was a pointer, for the speeding craft they were aboard had lined itself on course with the pointing ray and they were off on the scent—the course taken by the fleeing saboteurs.

"Sun-saboteurs," muttered Agar, his eyes intent on the complex finger motions of their pilot as his sinewy hands danced over the keyboard of control levers, each touch bringing a corresponding slight response he could feel in the seat of his pants.

June shrieked at him, trying to be heard above the thunder of their jets and the vibration of the hull as it strained to each powerful pulse of recoil from the rear: "These Valudins don't believe in petty crime! When they commit murder, they annihilate a dozen worlds. I wonder if they ever heard that crime doesn't pay?"

Gates bellowed back, proud of the fighting glint in her eyes and the thrilled, exciting flash of her teeth. "They have been getting away with wholesale murder for thousands of years, it seems. Let's hope this time they slip up."

"Talk about land grabbers . . ." she yelled, "what the white men did to the Indians wasn't new, it seems.

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It gives one the thought that crime is really inherited, like the teeth in your jaws."

A thought, cold and still and utterly grim, seeped into their excited, inspired minds. "We Spayderines spend our lives proving that crime is inherited. We are after individuals, while the fleet out there ahead of us is pursuing a vast nation, an empire composed of billions upon billions of innocent people, dominated by a few dozen superannuated demoniacs. They want to war upon the Valudin! We plan to remove the demoniacs, leave the nation of the Valudin untouched. There is a vast difference in concept."

Agar heard little June's mental agreement, while he puzzled over the intricacy of the implied procedure. It was such an easy thought, to blame the whole Empire of the Valudin peoples, a nation made up of over a hundred worlds under dozens of scattered suns, for the crimes of the few who led them. So easy, to bring disaster upon all those worlds, and so disastrous both to the pursued and the pursuers. The Spayderines had the right of it, yet how could a nation subscribe to the policy of assassination as he knew it was practiced by the Spayderines? They killed the suspect, on the principle that if they averted a war, the occasional mistake was worth it. They were right, of course, yet how could a man like Palan kill anyone from ambush? How could he train for the business of assassination as a policy, a life pursuit . . . yet he was right! It was preferable to warfare that included the sabotage of a sun! To cause a sun to nova, even if there was a way to do it, could only be contemplated by madmen. To track down and eliminate the demoniacs was of course the logical procedure. Then why did even this wise and ancient race insist on relegating such work to a secret society, not even centrally controlled by men of their own race, while they themselves insisted on total warfare? He quit thinking. He knew how nations were; when attacked they struck back. If the ships they were following fled to the home planets of the Valudin, they would start bombing, just as a ship of Earth would do under similar circumstances. But if he and Palan were right, the ships would take cover in the caverns of Earth or some other world containing the ancient abandoned works of the greater Elder race.

Agar decided that it was better to accept the Spayderine plan as perfectly logical and correct for all concerned. They could not control the government of the Mervan, but they could eliminate the motivating individuals and the war they were about to engage in would dissolve into an armed peace.

"Exactly," came the grim, cold thought-voice. "We are correct, assassination is the correct path to peace in every instance. Think back

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over your own wars in your own time? Would they have occurred if some secret society had been able to eliminate the leaders before war became a fact? I think not."

Agar mused: "I think so! If our own president had been assassinated in the opening days of a war, we would have attributed it to an enemy, the war would have occurred anyway, would have accelerated as they sought revenge."

The voice chuckled. "We do not eliminate the person who is used as the figurehead. The type of people we seek are almost never in the public eye, they are too fearful of their own skins. They invariably use a puppet ruler, and when the guiding hand is removed, the puppet collapses of his own weight—or becomes a satisfactory ruler. We do not care. But our real purpose is not to prevent wars. Our true purpose is to eliminate the potential demoniac, the inborn heritage of evil, the taint of destructive intent, before it penetrates the general blood lines of a whole nation. We work constantly among all the nations of the known universe. The Spayderine Corps is the largest body of trained operatives in existence. And we doom thousands of souls to death every day. Every second of every minute, some mortal dies at the hand of a Spayderine. When we are certain the blood is tainted, we kill."

Agar broke into a sweat, knowing suddenly he was in the hands of people who would kill him instantly if they knew he bore genes that would cause demoniac births. In spite of himself, his mind objected, his thought was furious, indignant at the callous recital of a universal slaughter of people who were guilty only of bearing the genes of some dead and gone criminal. "Sounds fanatic, sounds callous and it sounds damned unjust! How about the well-meaning child of a pair of schemers who murder some rich person for his money? Must he be killed too?"

The grim voice did not falter, but the answer was surprising: "The child could be clean. Evil is not necessarily inherited. There are two kinds of evil inheritance. In one type it is like cancer, an inherited cell-weakness. In the other it stems from emotional instability, arising from many factors not inherited, but due entirely to environment. We deal exclusively with the first type of crime."

"People susceptible to cancer do not necessarily get cancer . . . " commented June, watching the stars spin slowly aside as their vibrating nose-point turned slightly, as if it were following a plain trail in the empty black.

"You will learn our methods. It is a needed work. Ask a breeder of live stock how they create a fine breed of cattle."

"I hope the two methods differ," was Agar's acid comment.

A sudden laugh broke into his

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mental conversation, and he saw Palan's smiling face across the chamber, from his acceleration chair. Then he realized what Palan had been doing, reading his own thought back to him as he tried to imagine what the Spayderines really were and what they really did. And he heard Palan say: 'Part of your training will be to do that to people. You can always find an answer to a man's arguments in his own head. Our society does no one any wrong. We only kill when there is no other way to attain our ends, and our only end is to keep disaster from striking at the tree of man, as it has in the past so very often. We are the man-tree's living guardians, we take our work seriously, and we strive to cut down man's worst parasites so that the tree can grow. We are the white cells of the human blood-stream, do you see?"

Agar leaned back, sorry to have made a fool of himself listening to his own thought being read by another. He kept forgetting these men were vastly superior to himself, for in his life before his adventure into space he had never met a better mind than his own. It was taking him too long to adjust. But the little comment "Not too long," that he heard gave him a glow of new confidence.

THE pursuit wore on and on. They were tracing the fleeing saboteurs—if they were saboteurs, which seemed to need no proof—by means of the gaseous trace left in space by their passage; a delicate job of counting the atoms in the space about them done by a mechanism which registered every deviation from the norm of space matter content. "They leave a broad trail, who flee through emptiness. 'Tis easier than tracking a man after a snowstorm on Earth."

"Are they close?" June's thought was strong in Gates' mind. He felt admiration for the qualities he saw in her, revealed so completely by her lack of experience in telepathy, compared to the Mervani. A strong thought flow, hers, somehow always inspiring, and as pleasant to hear as to watch a skilled dancer.

"Not far, perhaps an hour's flight. The warhawks, the fleetest of the Mervan fleet, are perhaps a half-hour ahead of us on the trail."

"Have they been identified?" asked Agar.

"They have answered no signals, and of course they have not actually been sighted. They were detected on instruments."

"Everything depends upon the relative speed-potential then," was June's thought, flowing unconsciously, inadvertent telepathy. She had not yet learned to hold back her own thought from the audible range, as had the Mervani. They were both conscious of Palan's fierce resolution, running through all the interchange like background music: "They will be caught . . . " and they knew he was sure they were ov-

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erhauling the fugitive craft. "We should come within firing range in four hours or less." As June wondered why they used such slow craft for such a dangerous mission, he explained: "They had to use cargo craft, built for conveying the ore to dump into the sun. Let us hope they were the first sent on the run, and that they were detected before they dumped their cargo."

"Would they be fleeing with their holds full of ore?" asked Agar.

Palan shook his head. "It's possible, not probable. But it could be they had not had time to dump their cargo, and if so, then they could not jettison to flee, as they think we do not know their errand, and the analysis of their jettisoned cargo which we would inevitably make would betray that they think is their secret."

From a source undetectable to their untrained minds came a thought: "We expect a screen of warcraft, their convoy guard, to show up and give them opportunity to slip away during parley. This will occur at our borders in space, where the warcraft can legally wait outside our sphere of power. We cannot pursue them further without violating Unicourt rulings, unless we have absolute proof of the nature of their errand here. But I do not think our warcraft will stop to parley or to turn back from the pursuit, knowing what that errand was. The Valudin plotters are in for a surprise. They will not expect us to know what's afoot, will explain their cargo-carriers presence as merely some corner-cutting skippers reducing running time by using our sun's pull to get up high velocity. But this time they're in for a surprise."

AGAR leaned forward, watching the bow view-screen for sign of the fleets ahead. He hoped with all his heart they would not arrive too late to miss the action he felt sure would result. The air of tension in the throbbing ship increased steadily, and suddenly they both heard the mental cry: "Enemy craft, one o'clock ahead!"

For seconds Agar could not spot the dots, then he saw them, growing swiftly near the center of the screen, and he felt the pull of their changed course as the ship swung slightly toward the group of tiny dark objects.

The scene came rapidly on, and he saw a vast circle of ships, turning at high speed about a common center. The thought of Palan summed up the meaning of the scene to him, even as he realized Palan was reviewing the probabilities for the pilot to make his decisions, to understand, before he gave his orders.

"Our fleet came up on them as they waited under slow speed, and instead of slowing to parley, threw a net of orbits about them without slowing. The enemy craft are too close together to swing and fire individually. Their gunners are try-

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ing to scan the ultra-rapid flight of our ships, whose close-orbit flight makes their attempt to bring a sight to bear impossible. At the same time, our gunners have a comparatively motionless target, and are shelling them out of existence!"

Agar and June strained at their safety belts trying to see the whole complex scene as it seemed to rush toward them. The Mervan fleet had spun a net of speed about the half-dozen waiting warships, their high speed and tight circle and glowing exhaust gases giving the effect of a complex molecular drawing, of many glowing rings about a center made up of six separate nucleii. Lancing across these glowing rings of teriffic speed crashed fiery discharges of war-ray, bolts of terrific energy seeking out a target. Agar marveled that the gunners in those Mervan ships could hold their consciousness circling at such speed. They must have been under a dozen Gs or more.

As quickly as the scene of terrific conflict came near, it was gone, and they were speeding on and on into the emptiness ahead. The two Earthlings knew they were following the cargo carriers to their hide-away, and both of them felt that Palan was choosing the most dangerous mission, for now they were beyond Mervan borders, thrusting on into a no-man's territory between the solar systems, following the nebulous trail of microfine dust left by the jet streams of the fleeing ships ahead.

Quite suddenly their pilot threw the ship on a hard twisting turn, the nose rising sharply and to the left. For just an instant they saw the sudden fiery blossom spreading out where their ship would have been and then the sudden change of course and shocking blast of the barely avoided space-mine seized their bodies in a terrific crushing grip, and they became unconscious.

WHEN the darkness lifted from their minds, they saw the space ahead blank and empty as before with the vibrating tell-tale needle of the ion counter ticking off the trail of the fugitive craft still ahead.

Palan's thought was not directed to them, but they heard: "They are swinging in a long arc that will bring them to Sol IX, and I think that's their destination. I wonder if the latter-day Valudin group have resurrected the original craft used by their ancestors from their hiding place, used the same sources of fissionable ores and activator catalysts; perhaps used the same formulae for mass destruction developed by their ancestors so long ago?"

The thought that the ships they were following could still be operable after all that lapse of time seemed a ridiculous thought to Agar, until it occurred to him that a metal ship hidden on an airless body in space would not corrode where no oxygen was present. It was possible,

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and it was also possible from what he knew of those ancients that the craft were as well built as those of today, if not so powerful.

As they sped on and on, Agar saw ahead an occasional minute flicker of light, realized he was watching the blazing tubes of the enemy craft. He deduced they had slowed, and was not surprised as the vibration of their engines ceased altogether. He could hear Palan's thought, directing the pilot, and decided he was hearing a great truth expounded which he had himself glimpsed vaguely in the past: "We are watching the unfolding of a criminal act, from seed to blossom. I think we are experiencing one of the most remarkable cases of exact duplication of action pattern in accordance with the Law of Nature, that like produces like. The growth of the race of man parallels precisely the growth of a plant, even to the everlasting reproduction of identical leaves. A plant species produces identical leaves, generation after generation. In man, they produce identical acts, century after century. If one had sufficient data from the past, one could predict the day and the hour and even the manner of every crime of magnitude."

The pilot twisted his head suddenly from his intent watch of his detectors. "Can you predict exactly where this gang is going to hole up? If you can, we could cut across, let them think we are dropping a fruitless chase of a harmless oreboat or two, and be waiting for them when they arrive."

Palan nodded: "I can predict exactly where they will go, if my data is correct. I would say those craft are either copies of ancient Valudin warships, or are the identical ships which destroyed Sol IX's beneficient light an age ago. I would say they are heading to the identical place they were hidden then, on Earth's single moon."

QUITE suddenly the ship slowed, the great motors changed their throbbing vibration of power, and their nose swung away from the flickering dots of light many miles ahead. "You think the ores and catalytic agents were mined on the moon, too?"

"I am fairly sure, gambling on the repetitive inevitability of life pattern— which is not a gamble, but like betting that an oak tree will have acorns—that on the moon we will find evidence of the ancient crime which set Sol IX into destructive instability. We will find the ancient mines, the ancient ship-cradles, the chambers and living quarters, perhaps even the formulae and calculations of the original plotters, left there in some secure hiding place, known since only by the descendants of the original demoniacs who did that deed. And we will most probably find, if we get there before those ships ahead, evidence of their recent preparations for the voyage to Sol XIM, our own sun, to

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ɔommit the same terrible act of ɔomplete destruction of a rival race."

The pilot, apparently convinced ınd enraged at the same time, sudlenly shot power into the tubes of Spayderine craft, and the two Earthlings again blacked out as the ship plunged ahead at terrific acɔeleration.

Agar and June Tyne came out of t only in time to see their own noon's familiar face in the viewscreen. Agar watched the familiar scene of the moon's craters and nountains grow larger, as he found ıimself trying to reconstruct their easons for leaving the fleeing ships o cast ahead to their probable hidng place. He found himself in ɔomplete accord with Palan's deducions while he marveled at the man's ıudacity to place such trust in his own intuitive reasoning. He knew he craft they followed had taken an rratic course so that their eventual lestination could not be plotted or guessed at. But how did Palan igure the old original crime of sun abotage had anything whatever to lo with this one? How did he know hat had been done by Valudin nulear technicians, as well as this ne? And what made him think he original criminals had used the noon as a base, in plain sight of Earth's people, and also in perilous roximity to a sun-flare that could e estimated ahead only approximately?

To all these questions he could nly guess as Palan's swift thought raced ahead of the pilot's, pointing out landmarks below, showing the pilot the tiny dark spot beneath Telemachus' rocky pinnacles where he "guessed" the ancient entry way would be found. Agar guessed that Palan had spent a lot of time in some Valudin record vault, tracing their ancient activities, that he should be so certain—and was gratified as Palan took time from his intent supervision of their landing to fling at him:

"Correction, Earthling, I spent a lot of time watching a certain Valudin mind which had been in the confidence of superiors who should not have let him know so much. Before he died, I learned the disturbing possibilities of sun-sabotage in the Valudin program for expansion, and my deductions had not far to take me from there. Do not give me too much credit."

Even as Agar and June digested this, the Spayderine craft shot from the blazing sunlight of the moon's exterior into the black shadows of the mountainous rock spires, down and down, the pilot watching his proximity needles and by their use picking the exact center of a cavernous opening beneath to drive downward at what seemed to Agar suicidal velocity. The rocks closed about them as he realized they were speeding through a great rock tube at a speed of some two or three hundred miles an hour. They slowed gradually, but some instrument certainly gave them a good picture

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of what lay ahead, for they turned and twisted in a corkscrew as they followed the cavern tube down. Then they were floating over a vast bowl of twinkling lights, a city hidden here deep within the moon. Agar gasped, as he realized this city had been inhabited when he was on Earth, and June gasped as she gathered the same fact and wondered if it had not been peopled when the pyramids of Egypt were but a dream in a Pharaoh's imagination.

The ship descended, gliding low over the lighted dwellings, and Agar wondered to see there were no roofs. They were but skeletal structures. The walls were once constructed for privacy, perhaps. Inside he could see simple furniture, and occasionally glimpse a figure scrambling to hide itself from the sudden apparition so close overhead. Quite casually, it seemed to the Earthlings, they settled to a soft stop upon an open square within the strange city. Beside their craft moved dozens of near-naked human figures, and he could see the dark shapes of great space craft looming from the shadows at the edge of the square. Then one of the human figures came toward them, and June caught Gates' eye in puzzled amaze as they heard their locks open and the gangplank run out with a grind of gears and thump of counterbalances. Seconds later they heard the soft sound of naked feet beside them, and saw the tiny figure of a moonman standing before Palan, with a little conical cap twisting in his hand in embarrassment, his little good-natured round face wrinkled in surprise to see his visitors were not those whom he had expected.

Palan's greeting was a mystery to them, too. "I greet you in the name of the Spayder divinity, and am empowered to invite you to help the ancient cause of man against evil. You know of our power, O little one of the moon's hidden race?"

The tiny figure, not four feet tall, went suddenly down upon his knees, his hands clasped in supplication: "O Spayderine, no! Lord, say it is not so! We have done no wrong, our will is clean."

They saw Palan's smile, and watched him reach out and raise the little man to his feet, heard him try to put him at his ease. "One is not a criminal convicted because a Spayderine craft makes a call, little chief. But we have reason to believe that a mighty evil dwells nearby, and that you have been deluded into work that unknown to you could mean death to nations upon nations."

The little man pulled himself erect. Pride came to his face, and he raised a hand in solemn oath. "I swear to tell you the truth, without holding back anything. We have been employed in mining some of the moon's ancient ores, that is true. But they are fissionables for the manufacture of fuels, and we are

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very glad to have the chance to earn the Valudin credits. There are so many things we have come to need of late years. Our isolation has been long; we have been hard put to survive, the work came to us as a blessing."

"Heard you ever of the Sol-tyne Guilds, Man-u-lil?"

"Aye. I have heard of the ancient guild of Sun-smiths, yes. But their work was forbidden, an age ago. Such things are forgotten today, Lord of the Stars!"

"Not forgotten, O chief! But once their methods were used to cause a sun to go berserk temporarily. And we know the ores used in that forgotten crime an age ago came from this moon, and from those ancient mines you work again today."

The little chief pursed his lips, and his eyes were wary upon Palan's. "You think . . . " he asked, not putting his thought into words, and Agar saw he was not a telepath, but a cunning and wise mind anyway.

Palan nodded. The little man put a hand to his eyes, to wipe away the sudden tears of desperation. "Those who came here?" he asked again. And Palan nodded, saying aloud: "Will come again, within hours! To hide themselves after being caught in the act of sun tampering. If you hide them, you know what it could mean! And if you do not, they will kill you all to the last man and hide here anyway. I know you have been a slave to the Valudin merchants, Man-u-lil. I know your people have been forced to do their bidding, and that their payment has never been sufficient. Lately, they have been more liberal, for they foresaw. And, Man-u-lil, how is it you can serve the men who serve the power beneath the Earth-crust below? Do not say you do not know, for I can see within your mind."

The little man shrugged eloquent shoulders. "What use to lie to a Spayderine, Lord? You know we have no choice but to do as we are told and expect nothing. We got nothing, but they have had to feed us and clothe us . . . we are a slave race, Lord. For many centuries we have only kept the forms of freedom. I am an elected chief, yes But so many of us have died for resisting certain evils . . . "

Palan asked something that had been troubling Agar. "How is it that you know the ancient customs and the speech of the past, even to the word Sol-tyne? Have you an Elder record mech, and the library of archives of the moon . . . intact?"

The little chief nodded. "We have kept it hidden, and the Valudin have not tried to find it and destroy it; as they do on Earth to their slaves. For we had it under the sign of the Derrish, and it was covered with the long beams of a space-rake. They were afraid to enter, and we could not give them the words of passage,

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for they were sacred to one family who hid away and would not take their bribes. They had to leave us our ancient knowledge, destroying only our last ships, many centuries ago. We have been their slaves, for five hundred years and more. Can I go? I must take my people into hiding before you destroy those who come to their doom!"

Palan looked into the little man's eyes, and the Earthlings felt the sudden pulse of absolute hypnotic command. The little man left the ship, and they both knew he would not betray them, for he could not.

THEIR craft lifted, slid quietly over the roofless houses, inserted itself into a narrow opening between two much larger craft, slid on and on into the round boring beyond until the vision of the square they had left was confined to a small portion near the center. There they stopped and settled to the floor of the tunnel.

"This I distinctly did not expect," murmured June to Agar. He grinned at her flushed expectant face. "The gnomes were a little surprising to me, too, but it seems they've been known to the Mervani. Leastways, Palan knew they were here. But how did he guess he wasn't running into a moon full of enemies that would have blasted us apart?"

They could hear his casual: "Because they would naturally all be down on Earth having a good time, preparing to celebrate the end of the Mervani. In truth, I took the slight chance that the whole of the moon staff would have had to go on such a difficult assignment and it was but a guess. But the basis of my guess was the fact they can't let too many know their secrets, for this particular secret of theirs is very hot to hold. It could cause trouble for them at any time, for naturally everyone fears such deeds . . . now, please! Keep your thinking inside your heads for a while; I have to be aware of what's going on."

They both flushed with embarrassment, realizing they had been harassing a good-natured chief with their careless mental questioning, and both made a determined effort to make their untutored new telepathic powers behave—without much success.

A long hour drifted silently past. The tense waiting for a powerful enemy to come to the square they watched went on and on, even though there was every chance the departing moon dwarves might give the show away.

Agar guessed that Palan's last hypnotic command to the little moon chief had been to wipe away his memory of their presence and to substitute some other reason for his desire to take his people into a safer place. But wouldn't the absence of the little people give away their presence? Wouldn't the returning crews notice the silence and the empty roofless dwellings?

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THE waiting ended with a sudden crackling roar as the first of the returning craft swept overhead and settled heavily into the anding square. Again and again came the roar of the jets in the echoing tunnels of rock from the surface, until there were six of the great ore carriers lined across the square . . . and suddenly Palan said: "Now."

The Spayderine ship lifted as silently as it had come, Agar wondering how such silence was accomplished when ordinarily they made so much racket—and knew they were operating on a lifter beam of anti-gravity. Then suddenly their jets roared out and they were out of the shadows, catching the crews with their gangplanks down, scrambling from their ships.

Not waiting to discuss pros and cons, Palan gave the order as he had said *"now,"* in a calm detached voice, orally, so there would be no mistake: *"Fire!"*

The beams ravened out from the sides of their craft to bathe the scrambling men in liquid fire. The metal of the ore boats melted before them, became a pouring, sparkling fountain of disruption as the great ships softened and melted down in seconds. Not sixty seconds after his order to fire, the six great craft were but smoking rivulets of glowing metal streaming across the ancient rocky floor of the moon cavern. Then Agar saw why the little moon chief had come to them so obediently and directly: for a score of the uniformed crew of the ships came raggedly out of concealment about the square and with reluctant legs plodding in a strange mechanical way, approached their ship and entered. They stood in the long central compartment, and one by one came up the companionway to the bow chamber, to stand before Palan and speak as the moon-man had done.

"Greetings, my Lord, we who have done the greatest evil come before you at your will, to make our last testimonial to our crime. We are of Valudin, under orders to destroy the Mervani root-and-branch. But for accidental discovery it would have been done. We do not ask for mercy, for the nature of our crime puts us outside the call of humanity to its kind. Under the compulsion of your make-rays we disclose all. We have no remorse, the emotion is not in us. We are demon-bred in the caverns of Earth below. We learn other things than human kindness and compassion. We learn how to destroy our enemies and revel in their death."

One by one they came, to stand and speak strangely, the words wrung out of them as by some outside will, until Agar gave a cry of comprehension. In some of the many chambers of mechanism on this craft, operators stood, with rays directed upon these men, and the ray conveyed to them a vibration of

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electrical compulsion which replaced their own will with another will than their own—the will to tell everything they knew to this their enemy who had destroyed their comrades. And Agar saw that several recording devices were operating as the men spoke. Even their inner thoughts were lain bare, he knew, before this mechanical third degree which left them no choice but to recite every fact they knew that was pertinent. And as each man left, he walked down the gangplank from the ship and directly toward the still smoking ruins of red hot metal, and kept on walking until he was within the still molten mass of metal. There he dropped, and became motionless until his body was consumed by the flaming metal. After it was over, there was left of those ships and those men nothing but a pool of glowing iron. As they waited still, the iron cooled, and became a great smoking flat of grey hot metal upon the cavern floor.

THE Spayderine craft lifted, then, sure there were no more coming here to the moon. They passed along the great caverns of the moon another way than the way they had come. But they did not leave the moon. There followed days of search, guided by the moon men, for the ancient evidences and traces of that work. The ships that were left intact were searched, and every nook and cranny in the maze of caverns that was the moon's interior was pried into—after records of the crime of the past as well as the crime of today. And at last they were content: they had amassed a body of proof that would stand in court. The Valudin in truth practiced the murder of races, of worlds, by the practice of inflaming suns to a sudden outpouring of devastating heat.

Then they lifted from the moon's surface, and as they turned toward home, toward the distant green sun of Mervan, June Tyne looked down on her own Earth with a longing in her eyes that she did not voice. And Agar reminded her: "They would send you back to the rock, Karnak."

After that recent demonstration of grim capability in the art of destruction, Agar felt confident these specially trained Spayderine space men could handle anything. But, as they flashed out of the shadow of the moon into the blazing sunlight, he saw for an instant that they had not been alone in the dead black darkness. Now, glowing along all their sleek deadly lines from the combined sunshine and Earthshine, a dozen speeding craft swung into sudden circling erratic orbits about their ship. It was a similar maneuver to that used by the Mervani on the unwary Valudin warships, and Agar's heart sank as he saw they had the same advantage of greater speed and unexpectedness. The Spayderine specialists never had a chance. A deafening shriek came from their hamstrung engines as some perfectly aligned ray tore the guts out of

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the drive. In the same instant they lost acceleration, the ship began spinning, end-for-end as an enemy repel ray cunningly thrust at the rear tubes. Within seconds Agar heard the clank of what he knew must be magnetic grapples against the hull. He tried to look at the faces of the men about him, realized then that for some time he had been in the grip of a strong control ray, a synthetic neural current pulsing along an invisible carrier beam which contracted every fibre of every muscle equally, held him helpless. His mind reached nervously, seeking information, and his answer came in the form of a black wave of energy which wiped every mental impulse from his mind.

June had a death grip on his arm. Her fingers were contracted by the control ray until he was sure they were poking holes through his biceps. But he heard her mental voice, frantically crying: "These are the Valudin master-minds, the sun-destroyers! We're in for it now!"

In his shorted out mental circuits he dimly felt his own reply: "You have betrayed the fact we know what deeds they commit, and that seals our death, June." And he could have knocked his head against the wall to stop that reply from reaching her, but his muscles would not obey. And he could hear her self reproach, so dim, so pained: "Perhaps, without us along, the Mervan-trained minds could have kept our purpose here secret, not betrayed that we know the Valudin Lords plotted to destroy the emerald sun. But now, thinking openly as we do, there is no hope."

Blind and helpless and unthinking, with only that vague flickering of despairing consciousness between them all, the crew of the Spayderine Hawkboat sat, sunk in the flow of damping energies flooding the ship, held and bound by it. Dumb as beasts they waited for death.

(*To be Concluded*)

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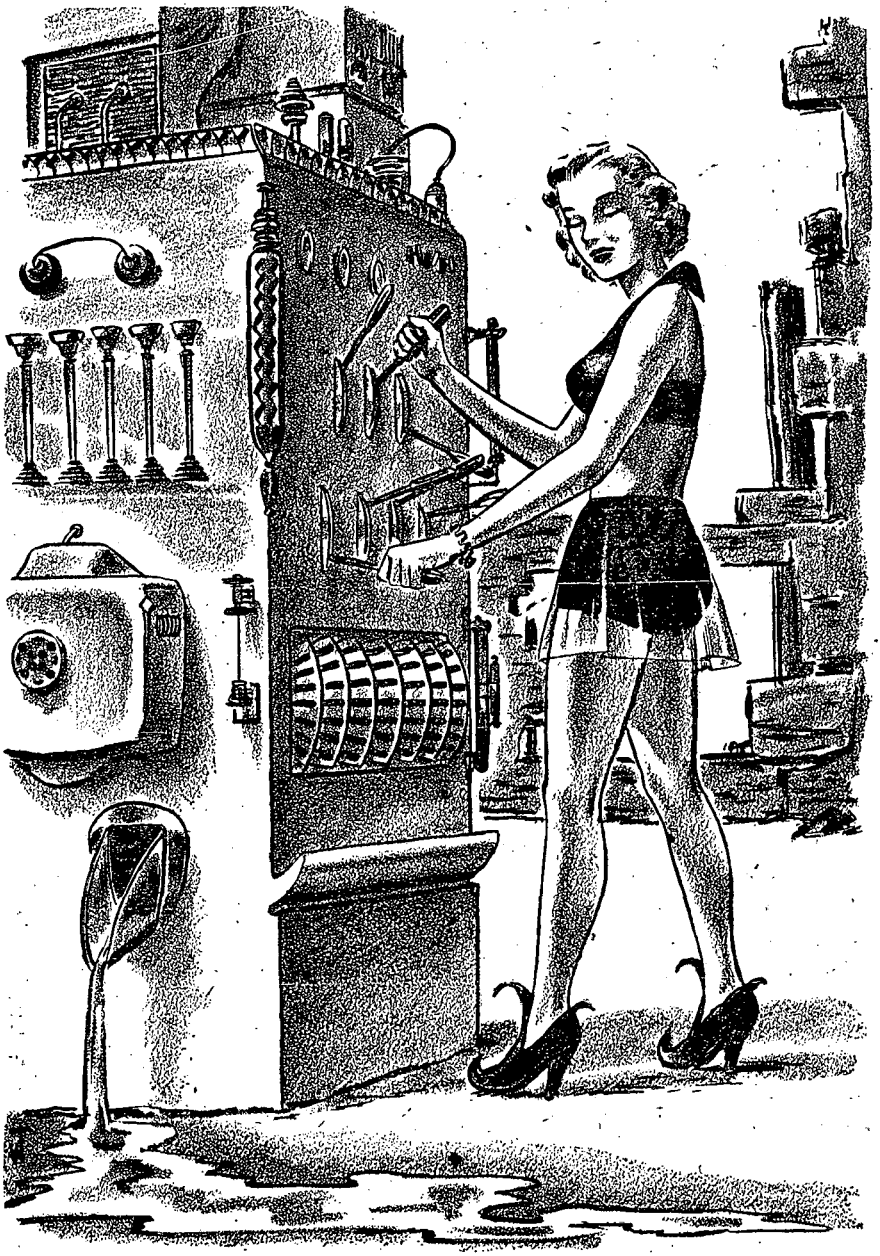

Illustration by Bill Terry

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LITTLE MISS BOSS

By E. Everett Evans

Robots were getting too smart — that's what the Earth people thought. So they passed a death sentence . . .

"JIMMY, I want you to go to Ekala," John Storer looked perturbed as he came into his assistant's office.

"What's up, Chief?"

"Hooper was so excited I couldn't get it all. Something about a conspiracy."

"What?" Foxe and his secretary-and-wife, Barbara, made a duet of unbelief.

"He just got a new shipment of workers from Terra. Maybe they are the ones . . . . Anyway, you'd better rush over there and straighten things out. We've got to get that furniture factory producing and those hydroponic vats finished."

"May I take Barbara with me?"

The General Manager suddenly grinned away his worried look. "If you think I'm going to try to separate you and Little Miss Ignorance, you're stupid — and I never called you that yet."

Barbara smiled and dimpled. "You're a darling, Uncle John."

The two ran out and they climbed into the jet-rocket for a quick trip to the distant city.

But they were vastly worried.

"I just can't figure out how . . ." Foxe shook his head.

"Me either," her own face was puckered with the intensity of her concentration. "It doesn't seem possible that any of us . . . ."

"What's it all about, Bill?" Foxe faced the worried superintendent, some time later.

"It's got me," Hooper's voice was as strained as his face. "Those new technies won't work. Some of my older ones report the newcomers are talking about seizing the next ship that comes from Terra. Say they're going back there to start a revolution and take over the government."

"But that's impossible!"

The other shrugged wearily. "Impossible or not, it seems to be true. Got any suggestions?"

"Let's get the facts first." Foxe was silent a moment. Then, "Suppose you call in the ring-leader, if there is one, and let's see what he has to say."

"There is one, but I don't know if he'll come," pessimistically. Nevertheless, Hooper touched a communicator stud, and the general speakers about the city carried his

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words, "Frank Scruggs, please come to the office."

The three talked desultorily during the quarter hour they were forced to wait. But Hooper did not know enough details to help them decide anything.

Finally a heavy-set, bold-eyed technician swaggered in. "What you want of me?" he asked truculently.

Foxe saw Barbara instinctively cringe away from that impossible ruthlessness. His own nerves crawled. "We want to find out just what you are after—what you plan to do?"

"Who're you?"

"Assistant General Manager Foxe," Hooper introduced him.

"Oh, *sir*, I suppose I should kowtow!" Face and tone sneered.

Foxe frowned "Why . . . why, no, of course not. I merely want to know what the trouble is here? What's holding up the work?"

"*The work!* You say that as though it was something holy. Why should we work at something that doesn't benefit us? If the humans want it done, let them come here and do it themselves."

"You know that until we have air and water, buildings, farms and homes and factories, humans cannot live here," Foxe tried to be patient.

"So what? Again I ask, why should *we* do it, when it doesn't do us any good?"

There was a gasp from Barbara and Hooper, and Foxe felt strange sensations within himself. Such a thought was absolutely foreign to the conditioning hitherto implanted in all androids, whose two most basic impulses were to serve humans selflessly, and to harm no one either directly or by refusal to give aid where needed or desired.

So how could this one possibly even think such thoughts?

"Why . . . why, that's what we were made for," Foxe stammered. "It's the very reason for our being."

"Yours, maybe," the voice was even more coldly sneering. "But not for me, nor for any of us who were just sent here against our will. We refuse to work at something that won't benefit us materially, or give us any satisfaction."

"But we get paid." Hooper was trying to understand all this.

"Bah! Less than half what human technicians are paid on Terra. Those damned *men* think of us and treat us as though we were nothing but *machines!*"

"Which, in a way, we are," Foxe said, "even if we do have the power of independent thought, and feelings and emotions."

"Then it's time things were changed and they damned soon will be! There are a lot of us here and back on Terra who feel the same way. And we're making plans. Us here, we're just waiting for the next ship to come in. We'll take it away from the humans, go back

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to Earth and take over the government. Then we androids will make the humans work for *us!"*

A fanatical light gleamed in those bold, piercing eyes, and the voice became demagogic. *"We* are the mightier race! *We* have the greater powers, the better brains! It is therefore right and just that we should rule, and those lesser humans serve *us!"*

"You're utterly mad!" Foxe whispered. Barbara, he saw, was crying.

"You . . . and all the rest like you . . . are stupid fools!" The mutinous android shrugged and turned away.

FOR the first time Scruggs seemed to notice Barbara, as he was now attracted by her sobbing. He walked over and stared at her, and a strange gleam came into his eyes. Suddenly he grabbed the petite figure by the arms, roughly pulling her to her feet.

"By Vahni, you're a beauty! I think I'll take you."

Foxe jumped forward, but a powerful compulsion halted him. He ached to defend his beloved wife, but how could he? There was that within him which positively forbade him fight against or harm another, no matter what the provocation.

But Barbara needed no defense. Her usually modest, shy manner dropped away before such roughness. She stopped her crying and her eyes met those of Scruggs squarely, their steady gaze like twin beams of power boring deep into his eyes and into his ultimate consciousness.

"You leave me alone!" her voice was low, but forcefully penetrant. And slowly, plainly against his will, Scrugg's grasp loosened and his arms dropped away from her. Deeper her will penetrated into his brain and his body became rigid and obedient to her.

"Sit down in that chair and don't move or speak until I give you permission," she commanded. Like an automatom he obeyed.

Only then did she relax, and with a shuddery little cry, threw herself into Foxe's arms.

"Oh, Jimmy, he . . . he . . ."

"There, there, Darling," croonингly. "It's all right now." His arms enfolded her and his hand stroked the blue-black curls caressingly.

Hooper had watched that scene with open mouth and bulging eyes. "Wha . . . what'd she do to him?"

Foxe looked across her shoulder. "Hypnotized him. But what are we to do with him, and the others like him? We've got to stop them some way."

"I haven't the least idea," Hooper's spirits were again at pit level. "What a ghastly thing! I didn't know any android could even *think* such things."

"What do you think, Bobby?"

She began pulling at her lower

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lip in the unconscious gesture of concentration Foxe had seen her make so many times. "I think . . . somehow . . . there's been an error . . . in making their brains," she said slowly.

"Can you do anything about it?"

"Me?" She looked startled. "Why . . . why . . ." Her eyes squinted and her face puckered in deep thought. The others waited breathlessly.

Long, long anxious minutes passed, then she relaxed. "We can't harm him, of course . . . but we can try to help him," she added happily. "We'll de-animate him, examine his brain, and perhaps find out that way what's wrong."

"Wonderful! I knew my Little Miss Ignorance would come through!" Foxe's eyes shone and his face lost its anguished look.

Hooper stared at them as though they were completely insane.

At Barbara's request, however, he silently helped Foxe carry Scruggs' heavy body into the laboratory. Still under Barbara's hypnosis, the mutineer could make no resistance.

From the materials in the lab Barbara made up the electrode-combination necessary for de- and re-animating one of her kind. In moments then the body was "dead", and she was skillfully opening the head and disconnecting the many wire nerve-ganglia from the iridium-sponge brain.

Then with a powerful magnifying glass she carefully examined every bit and part of that intricate mechanism, its every convolution and connector.

The two men stood by nervously watching her, knowing they were unable to aid, hoping and praying she might succeed.

Nearly an hour crawled tortoise-like away while still she studied. Then a quick intake of breath drew them swiftly and expectantly to her side.

"What is it, Darling?" Foxe asked.

For several minutes she did not answer, merely scanned more carefully a certain portion of that intricate brain. Then she raised her head, and they could see the triumphant look on her face.

"See, here, and here," she pointed eagerly. "Can't you see what happened?"

"You know we can't read anything there, the way you do, Bobby," Foxe said. "Tell us, quickly."

"The wave-sequence here is exactly opposite what it should be," she explained. "That means that instead of their having been conditioned to serve and protect, their brain tells them to hinder and to hurt. The conditioner at the factory where they were made has somehow become reversed."

"Then they'll all have to be destroyed," sadly.

"No, . . . I don't think so," she

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was examining that brain again. "I think I can fix it so it will be all right."

Hooper, not used to Barbara's genius, although he had heard of the things she'd done—as all the androids on Mars had heard—gasped.

Even Foxe marvelled anew at her transcendent abilities. This shy little typist was a never-ending source of marvel to him. He remembered so clearly his first meeting with her as she, a frightened newcomer, descended the gangplank from the ship that had brought her from the technical school on Terra to her work here. How he had made her his secretary, and found she'd had no primary education, so knew nothing of the simplest, most common-place facts of life and existence. She had never heard of music, or dancing, or of bird or animal-life . . . or of kisses. . . . until he taught her.

Yet such was her flashing genius she had soon proved to have the finest brain on the planet—probably on the two planets.

He watched now in silence as she worked, his eyes trying to follow and understand the minute changes she was making in that brain, the new connectors and channels she was establishing. Yet he could not fully comprehend her work.

Finally it was done, and the head closed. When the electrodes had been reconnected and the current passed through them, the three waited breathlessly for the first stirrings of life.

It came almost immediately, and the android moved, opened his eyes, then sat up. Barbara quickly removed the mechanism, then asked anxiously, "How do you feel?"

The robot looked at her wonderingly for a moment. "I . . . I feel different . . . somehow," he said hesitantly, and they noticed how much softer and more congenial his voice now sounded. They could tell from his strained concentration that he was studying his own mind, and from his quick, puzzled glances about the laboratory that he was wondering where he was, and what had been going on.

"Why," he said at last, almost unbelievingly, "I seem to remember having been thinking about and planning to attack humans . . . and about some sort of savage, evil thoughts about you," he looked at Barbara, shame in his eyes. "But how could that have been? Androids cannot harm a human, nor another robot. What happened? Why are you looking at me like that? And why am I here like this?"

Foxe explained quickly. "So now we'll have to test all the others, and see if they also had the wrong compulsions implanted in them."

SCRUGGS went out and, one by one, brought five of those latest androids into the laboratory. There their animation was suspended, the brain-case opened, and Bar-

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bara examined them carefully. In every case she found that same reversed wave-sequence and fixed it. When the android was revived, it was found he was now "sane", and ready to be released for work, which they were now anxious to start.

And not only "sane", each also had those remarkable new powers Barbara had learned to implant in android brains, as she had done with Wheaton, Shaffer, Storer and her Jimmy. They now had eidetic memory, could read a page at a glance, and their mental processes were all speeded up.

"Could Mr. Shaffer be assigned to me, Jimmy? I can teach him this process, and with others to assist him he can, in a reasonably short time, give this treatment to every one of us here . . . starting with these imperfect ones, of course."

"Sure we can, Darling, and that's a wonderful idea. Meanwhile, I'll go tell Storer about . . ." but just then a technie ran up to call him to the office.

It was Storer's haggard face they saw on the video-screen.

"What's the matter now, Chief?" Foxe asked in alarm.

"Vahni help us!" and they were stricken to see the usually-competent engineer actually trembling. "The main office just called me from Terra. The UN police found some androids there plotting to overthrow the government, and have destroyed them. Now there is a great hue and cry to have all androids and robots everywhere destroyed as menaces to humanity."

"It was some of those latest ones made," Foxe said soothingly, "like these new ones here. I was just calling to report that Barbara has found out what's wrong with them, and is fixing them up to be useful, cooperative workers. It seems the conditioning machine at the Terran factory must have become reversed, so that instead of implanting the compulsion to serve and not to harm, it is doing exactly the opposite. Call Terra and tell them that."

"I'm afraid it won't do much good. The politicians seem determined to do away with them. Our Chief there says they are even clamoring to have the fleet sent here to destroy all of us on Mars, too."

"Well, try it anyway," Foxe urged. "Barbara can explain to Dr. Varney and his scientists just how to do it, if they'll listen."

"All right," wearily. "I'll do my best."

As Foxe turned away Barbara looked at him with question marks in her eyes. "Does Mars belong to Terra, Jimmy?"

He shrugged fatalistically. "In a way it does, and in a way it doesn't," he explained. "Earthmen who first got here found it was a dead planet, and claimed it in the name of the United Nations of Terra."

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"But does that give them the right to kill us all?"

"Whether they've a right or not doesn't seem to matter to some of the leaders," he said bitterly, getting up to pace forth and back across the room, restlessly. "That's one of the strange things about humans. Most of them are such grand people, but some few have such a lustful desire for power they don't care what they do as long as they can have their own way."

"Yet they want to destroy all of us because a few—that *they* made wrong—want the same thing."

"Yes," he laughed mirthlessly, "it would be funny if it wasn't so tragic."

There was a time of silence, and they all grew sadder. Finally Foxe shrugged.

"I'd better get back to Terramars."

"All right, Jimmy." She kissed him fondly, and he hugged her as though it might be for the last time.

At last he broke away. "What's the use of your staying here to correct our brains," he said dispiritedly, "if men are bound to destroy us all? That won't stop them."

"No," she said slowly. She began pulling at her lower lip and he stopped dead still, waiting expectantly. That sign meant she was thinking of something new . . . and probably startling.

"But if they attack us," she raised her head sharply, and her eyes shone with the light of newborn ecstasy, "we can defend ourselves, Jimmy. Oh, Jimmy, we *can* defend ourselves, and we *will!*"

Foxe stared at her in amazement, then as what she had said fully penetrated into his brilliant, swift-thinking mind, he uttered a whoop of joy as he scooped her into his strong arms.

"Baby, you've got it!"

"What's a 'baby', Jimmy?" she asked innocently.

BACK at Terramars, Foxe found that Storer's call to Terra had brought about much the reception he had envisioned.

"I don't think anything can stop the politicians now," Dr. Varney had reported flatly. "It's the powerful majority party that's making the greatest outcry, because it's a good campaign slogan. Election's coming soon, you know, and they need a new 'cause' to espouse to stay in power. Why, they're even using those marvellous new techniques Mrs. Foxe learned and gave us so freely, as an example of why your androids should all be destroyed. They claim it shows you're becoming too powerful and are a menace to mankind. This latest matter of the mis-made androids just clinches their argument."

"But that's so silly," Storer had said. "Why would we have given them that knowledge if we intended to harm them?"

"Who knows? When I invented

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you androids I thought I had made it impossible for any of you ever to be a menace, and but for that short-circuit we found too late in the conditioning machine, this problem would never have come up. Mr. Snyder says we'll just have to stop them some way—probably by winning the election away from them. He's going to throw all his resources into the fight. Meantime, I'll keep you informed."

Storer and Foxe discussed the matter fully, and at the end the Construction Engineer sent out a call to all the androids on the planet to drop their work and come to Terramars for a conference.

"You all know the problem we face," Storer opened that meeting. "We know those things they're saying about us are lies. Now, how are we going to convince them we're not a menace in any way?"

"Can't we send a delegation to Terra to talk with the High Council of the United Nations?" a voice inquired.

"That's useless," another voice broke in pessimistically. "We're not *people*, and we have no rights. We might as well face that fact with whatever courage we have. If our Masters decide to destroy us, nothing we can do or say will change it. We can't fight them or their decisions."

James Foxe jumped to his feet. "That's no way to talk, Patmon!" he declared hotly. "It's true we can't fight them, but that's no excuse for not trying everything we can to show them how wrong they are."

"Yes!" "He's right!" "That's the spirit!" There was a clamor of agreement.

"I want you to listen to Barbara. She's got a real idea. You all know our 'Little Miss Ignorance', and the wonderful mind she has. How she fixed the big electronic calculator when it was broken and we couldn't get technies from Terra. How she solved the mystery of the old Martian machines at Charabis, and adapted them to our work here so we not only made up lost time but are 'way ahead of schedule. Go up to the platform and tell 'em, Bobby!" he urged.

She blushed and held back, but there were so many enthusiastic calls for her that she finally rose and started reluctantly forward. But when a great wave of applause greeted her appearance she hesitated, and looked as though she wanted to run back.

Yet her experiences had begun to change her in subtle ways she herself had not yet comprehended. She did have more confidence in herself, having begun to realize something of how far she had progressed since that day she'd come from Terra to that meeting with her now-beloved Jimmy, and her position with the Storer organization.

She also now knew—although a rocket-tractor couldn't have pulled the admission from her—that she

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had the most capable mind of them all here. So, instead of running she silently bowed her thanks for their sincere applause, then held up her hand for silence.

"Jimmy and I were talking about this the other day, and it came to us that while we cannot fight against or harm humans, there is no taboo in our make-up against defending ourselves if they attack us."

They were shocked into an instant of silence. Then the great throng sprang to its feet and they cheered this previously-unthought-of concept. Their faces shone with hope.

But after a moment of tumult, some of them started to think seriously of the problem, and they began to realize its many complications. Slowly they resumed their seats; then, when it was fairly quiet, one of them rose.

"How can we defend ourselves against their armies and their powerful battleships and guns and beams, without fighting back? How d'you figure to do that, Little Miss?"

"I have a few ideas, but haven't thought them completely through," she admitted slowly. "One thing we do have, thanks to the ancient Martians, is unlimited power."

"Yes, but so do the humans, now that you've given them the secret," another voice yelled.

"Perhaps, but I don't think they can match us. You see, they will have to mount their generators in ships, and that will limit their size and effectiveness. Ours will be planet-based, and consequently as large as we want . . . as large as we can control, I should say."

"But there isn't any defense against their atomic bombs and guided missiles and macro-beams, is there?"

"I think . . . I believe . . . no, I'm almost *sure*," she brightened as ideas flowed into her brilliant mind, "that it can be done if we get to work at once, and if we have time!"

"How?" The question came from hundreds of throats.

"I feel sure we can modify that anti-gravity device into huge pressors that will completely surround Mars with a force-field screen nothing can get through," her eyes gleamed. "We'll have to make hundreds—thousands—of them, and space them evenly all over the surface, but all controlled from one central board."

Another yell of joy from the great audience.

Technician Shaffer leaped to his feet. "I move we make 'Little Miss Martian' our defense leader, and give her absolute command!"

"Oh, no!" she shrank back, appalled. "I couldn't . . . it wouldn't be . . ."

"Oh, yes it would!" John Storer strode to the front of the platform. "All in favor, say 'aye'!"

It was a thunderous roar of "ayes" that rose, nor could Foxe, scanning that crowd carefully, see

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a single dissenter. He was so proud of his Bobby. He thrilled that she was at last coming into the place commensurate with her tremendous ability and sheer genius. Yet it left him a little sad—would she continue to love him as much now that she was . . . but that was the rankest sort of treason against her loyal, loving heart. He *knew* she loved him too much for anything even of this nature ever to turn her away from him.

Bridge Superintendent Wheaton jumped to his feet. "Three cheers for our 'Little Miss Boss'!" he yelled, and they were given with a will.

Barbara's face was shyly aflame, yet her new-found greatness of spirit and knowledge of her ability steadied her. She raised her hand again, and they quieted.

"Thank you all so much. I can't understand why you want *me* to take charge," and they loved her more than ever for her lack of pride or ostentation. "But since you seem to, I'm asking you all please to go back to your jobs and work harder than ever to finish what the people of Terra sent us here to do for them. As I need any of you, I'll call you."

THE following days were such busy ones for the newly-appointed *Little Miss Boss* that she hardly had time for sleep. Foxe, busier than ever with his own work, saw her but seldom in those long, lonely days and nights. Yet he realized the importance of what she was doing, and he made no outward complaint that might worry her or lessen her abilities. But . . .

"Gee, Darling, it's wonderful to have you alone for awhile," Foxe couldn't help smiling his happiness on one of their rare evenings together.

"I know it's hard to be apart so much, Jimmy," she crept closer into his arms and she raised her lips for another kiss. "That's why I'm so glad I can talk to you with my mind occasionally."

"I sometimes wish we could stop our other work and concentrate on our defense plans," he said slowly. "But I know we can't. Funny, isn't it, that we're built so we have to keep on doing our best for the very people who are trying to destroy us?"

She shook her head. It was too much even for her.

After a silence he asked, "Figured out how to make that pressor-screen you talked about?"

"Not entirely," she shook her head, and the blue-black curls danced in the way he loved.

"What's mostly holding you back?" Because of his engineer's training he was perhaps more interested in this problem than in any of the others she'd worked on. He couldn't — or hadn't yet — been able to see any possible way of producing the effect she needed.

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"It's a matter of phasing and homogeneity," she said slowly. "I know how to send the power out hundreds of miles in a spreading cone, even to exact pre-determined distances. What I have to figure out now is a way to make the output of one generator join or mesh into that of the next without any break or seam that can be broached. The joints must be completely homogeneous, and the whole a perfect sphere."

"Whew!" he whistled in amazement, his mind racing over the magnitude of that problem. "Is it possible?"

"Theoretically, yes," she answered. "I've got to figure out some way, mechanically, of shifting the plane of each electron's vibration from vertical to parallel . . ."

"What?" he was aghast. "That can't be done."

"Yes it can, theoretically," she reached for a pad of paper. "Look here," and she swiftly began writing down complex equations. His eyes and his mind followed her flying writo. As she progressed, his eyes widened with dawning comprehension.

"Oh!" he breathed out. "But that's entirely new, Darling. Are you sure your math is right?"

"Of course I'm sure. Do you see any flaws?"

"What about equation 37 there? You've transposed."

She squirmed off his lap and ran to the bookcase, coming back with a book in her hand. "The method's on page 196," she leafed through to the page her eidetic memory knew contained the theorem she wanted. "See!" she held it out to him triumphantly.

He scanned it instantaneously, and an embarrassed look came into his eyes. "My own textbook, that I've studied and am supposed to know," he said disgustedly.

She bent to her pad again, and continued working out the complex computations her brilliant mind conceived.

Foxe didn't have her flashing genius, but he did have considerable intellect and he had far greater engineering experience. Time after time he challenged some point, and those she couldn't defend successfully she found a way around, or she took another line of attack. Hour after hour they worked, and the table and floor became covered with sheets of equations, while the reference books from his library were scattered about.

Finally she wrote down a single equation, and he pounced on it triumphantly.

"Hey, that's it!" he yelled in joy. "That's what we need! That'll give us our complete sphere of force, pointing outward and yet completely homogeneous. Now here's the application," and he began sketching rapidly the design of a mechanism. "We can cut in stage

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amplifiers here . . . and here . . . and wind that sequence to reverse the wave-form . . . so . . . and that'll give us the complete jointure between each individual generator."

"Oh, yes, I see!" and she kissed him happily. "What a team we are, Jimmy!"

"You said it, Honey Chile. When the two of us tackle a problem it's as easy as falling off a log."

"What's a 'log', Jimmy?"

"You know what a tree is. When it's cut down and the branches lopped off, the trunk remaining is called a log."

"But why does anyone want to fall off one?"

He looked at her owlishly. "Philosophers have discussed that important question for thousands of years."

She looked at him doubtfully, but when he began to grin she laughed, too, and switched the subject.

"Let's get over to Mr. Storer's office and have him start the technies making the machines for us."

"You don't have to do that," he said wonderingly. "You're the Boss on this defense project. Give the orders yourself."

She looked at him reproachfully. "Why, Jimmy, I'm surprised at you. Haven't you realized that Mr. Storer, wonderful as he is, feels just a little hurt that someone else has supplanted him in a way. I know he knows he can't do what I have to do, but I'm not going to hurt him any more than I have to. That's why I give all orders to workers through him."

His eyes were contrite. "I'm sorry, Bobby. I should have thought of that myself. You're absolutely right, as always, and I'm a louse."

"What's a 'louse', Jimmy?"

"The lowest form of life, which is the way I feel right now."

DESIGNERS and draughtsmen plunged into the work of perfecting the plans for the heavy generators that were to send out the repulsing field, while others worked out the specifications for the enlarged atomic-power generators they would need.

Thanks to the greatly enlarged mental capacity of those androids who had already been operated upon, and the new ones who were coming off the "assembly line" every few minutes — for Barbara was seeing to it that Shaffer and his assistants were treating every one of the androids as fast as possible — the work went swiftly.

New problems came up almost hourly, but all were quickly solved—some by Storer or Foxe, but most by Barbara.

The tons of the great machines as they were built were easily handled with the aid of the portable anti-gravity machines, and could be transported to their appointed places without too much trouble. The time element became their great problem. For there were simply not enough jet-rockets here on Mars to tow the machines where they should

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go, as fast as they were being made.

Barbara solved that problem, too. She worked out the idea for a small anti-gravity unit hooked onto a harness an individual could wear, then attached to the same harness a small propulsion unit. Thus, when a machine was completed, an anti-gravity unit was attached to it, and one worker could tow it into place without help, flying with it at great speed.

With their advanced technology and rapidly-growing construction resources, the power generators and the force-field generators were coming off the lines at the rate of several per hour. For the androids, realizing that their very existence depended on it, were working steadily and efficiently twenty hours per day.

"If we can have another thirty days, we'll be ready for anything Terra can send," Foxe examined the reports one evening. Barbara, almost at the point of exhaustion, looked up from the couch where she was trying to get a bit of rest. For even the androids needed rest and sleep occasionally, although not as much as humans do.

"What's the latest news from Terra?" she asked anxiously.

"Election day's only three weeks away, and the party advocating our extinction seems to be ahead. If they win, it will only depend on how long it takes to get the fleet ready and on its way here. How's your work coming?"

"We're having trouble with the generators," she sighed wearily. "The contact points won't stand up under continued load with such terrific power going through them. We've got to get a better metal. But I can't think!" she wailed. "My mind's so sluggish lately."

"No wonder, you poor darling," he came over and he sat on the floor beside her, and he fondled her soft hand. "You work so hard. You've got to get more rest!"

"But I can't!" she cried, and her eyes welled with tears. "They all depend on me, and there's so much to do, and so little time."

"You won't last if you don't rest," he said sternly. "I'm going to put you to bed, and you're going to sleep for at least twelve hours so your brain can recuperate. Now don't argue," he said severely, as she started to protest. "You may be Little Miss Boss of Mars, but I'm still Mister Big Boss of this family!"

She smiled at him fondly, and her eyes closed. "I'm too tired to argue, Jimmy. Maybe you're right. I would-feel . . . better . . . if . . . I . . . . . ," the words trailed off, and her spent body fell into the welcoming embrace of blessed and total unconsciousness.

Jealously he guarded her, and he let nothing waken her. Several times their visiphone buzzed, but he refused to call her.

"Take care of it yourself!" he commanded the anxious technies

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who called. "Barbara's fagged out, and she's got to get some sleep!"

"Oh, sorry!" the answer was invariable. "We can't lose *her*. We'll make out some way."

When she finally woke late the next day, Barbara slowly opened her eyes. She stretched like a lazy cat, and then she looked over at Foxe, who had finally fallen asleep by her side. A look of utter devotion came into her beautiful eyes, and she softly kissed him.

He stirred and he opened his eyes. "Hi, Beautiful!"

"Hi yourself," She kissed him again. "Thanks for making me sleep, Jimmy. I feel wonderful now. Let's get going."

They hurriedly dressed and they took a cab to the office.

"'Bout time you two showed up," John Storer pretended to growl, but his eyes were smiling fondly. "There's a dozen things waiting for your consideration," and he shoved a sheaf of messages into Barbara's hands, then he turned to Jimmy.

"Get over to the atomic generator factory, fast. They've had a breakdown."

"Yipe!" and Foxe was gone in a rush.

"Bad?" Barbara asked anxiously.

Storer shrugged. "I don't think so, but they need an experienced engineer like Jimmy to get it fixed as fast as possible."

Barbara went into Foxe's office, and she used his visiphone. Technie after technie she called, and she handled the various problems they submitted to her. Finished, s went back into Storer's office.

"Tell Jimmy I've gone to Char bis, please," she said. "There's o machine there I want to study sor more. I'm beginning to get an id about it."

Storer smiled at her fondly, a father might at a beloved daug ter. "Do you know you're slight wonderful?" he asked softly.

She looked at him, and a roguis smile appeared in her eyes ar on her lips.

"What, only slightly?"

He grinned back at her. "Get ou of here, you young imp, before paddle you."

"What's 'paddle you' mean, Unc John?"

"If you're still here half a mi ute from now you'll find out," h warned her, laughing, and she ra out, pretending to be terrified b his threat.

At Charabis she studied the par ticular machine that had been frus trating her. She hoped her inspira tional idea of what it was suppose to do was right. She needed it so

She removed the outer plates fror its base, after de-magnetizing th nuts and bolts as she had learne was the only way they could be loos ened. Then for hour after hour sh traced the machine's inner workings

The helical machining in this on was far different—far more com plex—than any of the others, and was her greatest concern. Time afte

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time she scanned it for long, long minutes. Yet she was very careful every few seconds to close her eyes tightly for a moment, lest those impossible twists and turns that she knew somehow ran into another dimension, hypnotize her and steal away her mind. For she had developed the process of subliminal perception—the ability to comprehend sights and phenomena, sub-consciously, that were below or beyond the threshold of direct visual perception.

Gradually the function of that incredible helix unfolded to her tremendously capable mind.

She sat back on her heels, and she pulled at her lower lip in abstracted concentration.

"It doesn't seem possible . . . but those old Martians were so far ahead . . . those other machines do things men never knew how to do . . ."

She squatted there, and her brilliant mind reviewed everything she thought she had discovered about this enigmatic mechanism. Finally she arose in determination. "I'm going to try it, anyway," she said aloud, defiantly.

Quickly she went over and she started the little atomic generator. Then she hurried back to the larger machine.

She could feel the surcharge of power in the thin air within the strange, old Martian building with its reversed-curved stone walls, and she knew the machine was receiving the broadcast energy.

Carefully she read the Martian glyphs on the sliding, piston-like gauge she knew was its control. She made some precise calculations, and then she set the control at a determined point.

She scooped up a double-handful of the silica sand that had been brought from another part of the planet for use in the atomic generator. She let it run through her fingers into an inverted cone-like opening near the top.

She hesitated a bare fraction of a second, then she took a deep breath and she pressed home the starting plunger. Instantly there was a deep humming noise—the first sound she had ever heard any of these marvelous old machines make. Was this one broken? she wondered with a catch of breath. But suddenly from one of the orifices in the machine there came a thin stream of heavy, viscous liquid that poured out onto the floor, and began to solidify.

Quickly she shut off the machine. She could feel no heat from the material, so she picked it up. She ducked through the low doorway, then she ran toward the shops a half-mile or so away. Through the outer door she dashed, panting, up to a technician who sprang up, in surprise.

"Please test this for me, quickly!" she begged, as she thrust the heavy matter into his hands. "I think it's

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iron," she answered his inquiring look.

Swiftly he performed the various tests for which this shop-laboratory was equipped, and finally he turned to her.

"Yes, it's absolutely pure iron. I can't find a trace of impurity in it, except the sand that was sticking to it. Where'd you get it?" his voice was excited.

"I made it!" her voice sang. "With one of the old Martian machines I made it. I think I can make any element!"

"What?" his eyes bugged out so she had to laugh.

"Yes," she bubbled. "Come and see, all of you!"

She ran out as he yelled the astounding news in swift words, and soon the entire personnel of the shop was following her flying figure across the red sands.

As they stood around the machine in a wondering circle she manipulated the sliding gauge to one position after another until she had samples of a dozen or more elements, and the little amount of sand she had poured into the hopper was exhausted.

"Transmutation, by all that's holy!" the technies yelled, and she blushed and she looked down shyly as they began dancing around her, yelling their excitement and their praises to her genius.

EVEN while she was flying back to Terramars, Barbara telepathed Foxe that she had some wonderful news, and to meet her in Storer's office.

He and Storer were almost speechless when she told them of her latest discovery, and showed them her samples.

"Great Vahni!" Storer finally got his breath. "Now we can do almost anything. With absolutely pure elements in quantity for scientists to study and work with . . ."

"Water!" Foxe yelled suddenly. *"Water and air!* That solves those problems for us now!"

"Oh, how wonderful!" Barbara's eyes were shining. "I hadn't thought ahead that far."

"You're the one that's wonderful!" It was a duet from the two men.

Barbara suddenly sobered. "I hope maybe now we can find a metal that will hold us as points for those field-coverage generators."

"It'll have to be something brand new," Foxe was doleful. "Even tungsten's been breaking down after a dozen or so hours, so much power goes through them."

"I'll get the boys working on it right away," Storer reached for the video switch.

"What's the latest news from Terra?" Barbara asked.

"Ten more days until election, and I think the antis will win," Foxe was still gloomy.

"Then we must be ready for them," she straightened. "I'll go back to the lab at Danaris, and the old machines at Charabis, and help find

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that new metal." She bid Storer farewell, kissed Foxe fondly, and was gone.

"What a gal!" exclaimed Foxe, and Storer echoed his thought, "What a wonderful mind!"

AND that wonderful mind came through again. Barbara and the metallurgical technicians worked out an alloy of such hardness that even after well over a hundred hours of constant use it was still standing up under the tremendous strains and fluxes of their heaviest generator.

As Election Day on Terra drew nearer, the androids on Mars became keyed to ever high pitches of intense feelings. Each one reacted according to the temperament that had come from their training and the variations of their mechanical-yet-sentient brains.

Some became almost uncontrollably gay and irresponsible, while others grew morose and sullen. Those of them whose brains had been operated upon—nearly half by that time—continued in their accustomed manner. Only now they worked more swiftly and efficiently, to finish the defense work before the expected attack came.

Barbara grew tight-lipped and her beautiful eyes more intense as she flung more and ever more of her splendid genius into the solving of the complex problems that confronted them. But no one ever heard her complain, and she continued shyly to *ask*, not *command*, the various ones to do what had to be done.

And when Election Day came and was gone, and they knew the Terran fleet had been ordered to Mars to destroy them and their work, they simply speeded up still further the manufacturing and placing of the great energy machines.

On a huge map of Mars hung in Storer's office, Barbara noted carefully each unit as it was placed, and directed by visiphone this vital work.

"How long will it take the fleet to get here, Jimmy?" she asked anxiously.

"The passenger liners take fifteen days, but battleships will probably make it sooner—the men are more accustomed to greater acceleration. We can't count for sure on more than another twelve days, I'm afraid."

"I'd say more likely ten," Storer disagreed.

"Ummm," Barbara was figuring swiftly in her head, "in ten days we'll be almost ready, in twelve completely so. Let's hope—and work faster."

But it was early on the eleventh day when the look-outs reported the fleet in sight some quarter of a million miles off.

"That means only a few hours." Barbara stepped to the video-plate that for the past several days had connected her direct to every screen on the planet.

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"Attention everyone! The Terrans have been sighted, and we must be ready within three hours. Hurry, everyone! Oh, hurry!"

She turned to Foxe, and he could see how nervous and taut she was. He put his arms about her, and he soothed her. "It'll be all right, Baby. You'll make it . . . but if by some chance we don't, just remember all the wonderful times we've had together."

"I know," she kissed him hungrily, "but I want them to last forever and ever."

"They will, Little Miss, they will!" he assured her with a sureness he did not actually feel. For within him was also a mind-shaking dread. Not fear of dissolution as such, but a vast *dismay* at thought of a possible discontinuance of their life and love together.

"One hundred and fifty thousand miles," the speaker from the lookouts announced some time later.

"Places everyone!" Barbara commanded through her plates, and now Foxe was glad to note that her voice was steady and sure.

From another speaker came a continuous mumble as crew after crew and man after man reported, often times many voices superimposed.

"Number forty-six sixty-seven placed and ready. Number forty-six sixty-eight placed and ready. Number forty-six . . ."

Storer, who was now handling this speaker and the map, now called cheerily to Barbara, "Only three hundred and thirty more and they're coming in about ten a minute. We'll make it!"

"One hundred thousand miles," the big speaker informed them.

Barbara crossed over to the main switchboard, and she laid her hand on the big switch.

"How close you going to let them get before you form the field?" Foxe asked.

"I hoped we'd have it ready as soon as they were sighted," she said, and her forehead creased with a frown. "But I've got to give our people all the time to finish up that I can."

"Seventy-five thousand miles."

"How many more, Uncle John?"

"Less than two hundred, and they're reporting so fast I can hardly catch the individual numbers."

Barbara glanced nervously at the big wall chronom, and she figured swiftly the remaining minutes.

"Fifty thousand miles."

"Forty-eight fifty just reported!" Storer called. "We'll make it yet!"

There was a cheer from those in the office, yet there was a catch in the voices of those who cheered.

"I'm feeling better by the second!" Foxe yelled in a voice he tried manfully to make gleeful.

Barbara looked over at him fondly. "Thanks, Jimmy."

"Twenty-five thous . . . wait, the screen's picking up a lot of little points—can't make out what they are yet."

"Small scout ships, or guided mis-

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siles, I'll bet," Wheaton said from his station. "They'd probably have a bunch of them out ahead."

"The small dots have a speed almost double that of the fleet," the speaker blared. *"They're down to ten thousand miles already."*

"How many left, Uncle John?" Barbara called, her hand still on that great switch.

"About a hundred."

"Can't you form the screen now, and let them keep on adding in the new ones?" Wheaton asked.

Barbara shook her head worriedly. "I'm afraid of a backlash of power that would burn down the machines and the men working on them—and perhaps failure of the screen to form."

"Small dots down to five thousand miles—they look like guided missiles!"

"We can't wait any longer," Barbara decided suddenly. Into her plate she called, "You men who haven't finished drop your machines where you are and get under one that's finished, if possible. Get away, fast! I can give you only thirty seconds!"

The very room seemed over-filled with mounting tension as the androids watched the sweep-hand of the big wall-chronom flash around the half-circle.

"Those damned heroic fools!" Storer muttered, but in that awful stillness everyone heard him, and they suddenly realized that the steady drone of reporting voices was still coming in. It was apparent that not one of the technies placing the great generators had obeyed Barbara's orders. Each was still fighting to get his machine in place and hooked up ready to operate.

"Oh," she wailed, "why don't they get away? They'll all be killed . . . and we can't wait any longer!"

"They know the chance they're taking, Darling," Foxe's voice was filled with respect and admiration for those fearless, selfless technicians. "Just do your job, and forget them for the moment."

"I can't!" she suddenly dropped her hand from the switch. "I can't kill them!"

"One thousand miles!"

Foxe motioned another to take his station, and jumped to her side. His voice was urgent.

"You must!" and he grabbed her hand up and he placed it on the switch again. "You aren't killing them—they are *giving* their lives for us all! Don't spoil their heroism!"

And as she still hesitated, he exerted pressure, and their two hands engaged the great switch.

Instantly there was a crackling sound and the feeling of infinite power that seemed momentarily to freeze everyone in the room with its intensity.

"Look!" Wheaton, whose post was near a window, suddenly pointed out and up, and his face was filled with awe.

They all rushed to the nearest

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window and they gazed skyward. Overhead, as far as the eye could reach, was a great, shimmering, opalescent curtain. It was beautiful beyond words, and they stood rooted in awe, almost appalled by thought of the tremendous power it signified.

"The small ships or missiles are striking the screen!" the voice from the big speaker was strained. Anxious moments dragged away, then came a paean of joy. *"It's holding! They can't get through!"*

"Yeow!" Foxe yelled, "Our Little Miss Boss has done it again!"

"The big ships are hitting the screen now," the voice was again anxious, and the tumult in the room died away abruptly. There was a long, long, heart-breaking pause, then a yell of victory. *"They can't get through! They're sliding and slipping around like a ground-car on slick ice! Those that have tried to ram it have actually* bounced *back. Even their heavy beams can't penetrate. They simply splash!"*

Barbara fainted.

IT took the Terran Admiral about six hours to reach the unbelievable conclusion that, with all his power, he couldn't crack that peculiar, shimmering screen of force anywhere about the planet. Reluctantly, he finally ordered "Cease fire!" and turned to his communications operator.

"See if you can make contact with those damned robots!" he commanded sourly.

The operator flipped switches, and soon the admiral's plate lighted.

"Hello there on Mars! This is Admiral Eddy speaking. I want to talk to whoever is in charge of you mutineers."

In the office on the planet Barbara beckoned to John Storer as that voice came roaring through, but he shook his head.

"You're in command," he said simply.

She looked appealing at Foxe but he, too, negated. "It's your job, Darling."

Reluctantly, she stepped before the plate, looking very small and unsure, but her voice, while low, was steady.

"This is Barbara Greenwood Foxe, Admiral Eddy. What do you want?"

"A woman?" he roared in anger. "A damned girl! What the hell's the idea? I want to talk to your head robot, not some snivelling female!"

White with anger, James Foxe jumped forward, but Barbara motioned him back. She straightened and she looked steadily but serenely at the infuriated admiral, while her mind reached out across space to touch his, and her voice became slightly stern.

"Sir, I was unanimously elected by these people to speak for them. If you cannot accord me the respect due a Planetary Head, I shall cut off my video."

Slowly the anger drained from

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his face, and he became more conciliatory. "I apologize. I thought someone was trying to be insolent, sending a mere secretary to talk to me. What I want to know is, what do you plan to do, now that you've successfully mutinied against the will of the United Nations of Terra?"

"Why, sir," and now both her voice and her eyes were clear and unafraid, "we intend to continue and complete the task we were sent here to do, of course — make the planet Mars ready for human colonization."

"What?" They had never heard that word express such surprised wonder.

"But if that's the way you feel, why did you mutiny?"

"We haven't 'mutinied', as you call it, sir. We merely protected ourselves. You know no correctly made robot can fight against nor harm any human."

"Well, I'll be damned!"

Barbara went on serenely. "If you will put me in touch with some of your scientists, we have another wonderful technique for the people of Terra. For we have just solved another of those old Martian machines. This one transmutes ordinary silica sand into whatever element one desires."

"Well, I'll be damned again!"

There was a short space of silence, while his piercing eyes stared deeply into hers, astonishment finally giving place to wonder. Then he asked, in a far more humble tone, "May I ask what that screen is, that is stopping us?"

Barbara barely hesitated. "Sir, I think we will wait until your fleet is back on Terra, and we have been given assurances it will not be used against us again, before answering that question."

He looked startled, then began grinning, then chuckling, and was soon roaring with laughter. "Fair enough, young wom . . . er . . . well, fair enough," he said when he could control himself. "I know when I'm licked. I take my hat off to you. You're a pearl of beauty and worth."

"What's a 'pearl', sir?" Barbara asked naively.

"What? . . . why, a pearl is a beautiful, lustrous gem formed in oysters back on Earth."

"What's an 'oyster', sir?"

"An oyster is a bivalve mollusk found in the ocean." His eyes began narrowing.

"What's a . . .?"

"Say, what the hell sort of a dumb-bunny act is this, anyway?" his anger flared again, and they saw him turn his head, and more faintly, heard his voice bellowing the command, "Blast for home!"

Barbara turned with a hurt look in her eyes. "He didn't tell me Jimmy. What's a . . . ?"

But everyone in the room was roaring with good-natured laughter.

The End

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TRACK of the BEAST

He didn't even know his name—nor even if he was human! And yet he had to be a human and track down—something called a Beast!

IN all the world about him there was not one thing he recognized —not one face that was familiar. He was not even certain that the organisms of the beings he saw were similar to those he should know about. In fact he was certain of — absolutely nothing!

He stood with his eyes staring straight ahead, his features twisted with tortured interrogation, and his body rigid with frozen, abnormal tension. Each impact of the outside world would beat upon his consciousness with the stark fear of the unknown.

A one-eyed beggar limped toward him, mumbling in a strange language.

The sound of the beggar's words was picked up by his auditory system and channeled into his brain. He felt a subtle, intangible meshing of thought processes, as though waiting cogs were slipping into place. And he understood what the beggar was saying.

"Alms. Alms."

His hand responded to the words —with no directive from the brain. He reached into a side pocket and removed a round metallic disc. He placed the coin in the beggar's outstretched hand.

The beggar palmed the coin, touched his forehead and showed toothless gums.

The words of the mendicant had fitted into prepared channels and he had reacted to them. A simple process of practiced response to stimulus. Vaguely he understood this,

Illustration by Bill Terry

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By Charles V. De Vet

"Who Am I?" he asked the box.

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but beyond that his reasoning stopped. To reason he must have the tools of reason: Words. And he had only one — *Alms*. It was not enough.

Desperately he sought for some small segment of facts from which to reconstruct his past. Who was he? What was he? What could he do to find out?

A great nameless terror threatened to engulf him. He was impotent— terribly, starkly impotent! He could not even think.

Now he fought the blackness of despair. Fought to bring the intricate excitations within himself under his control. He drew three deep breaths, concentrating on the respiratory function. He sensed that this would hold back the terror by diversion. He let his intuitions assume full sway.

By the time he had expelled the third breath a plan of action had crystallized. He must manufacture his own tools of thought. And he understood what they must be: Word pictures.

He looked about him and let the flood of impressions pour in upon him. He dissected the stream into its components and categorized each detail. He made no attempt to ascribe significances yet.

Concrete objects first. A stream of opaque liquid flowed by a short distance away. He let its picture register. Though he had no way of conceiving the abstraction of distance. Next a tree. The solid matter he stood on was colored an off-shade of the liquid in the stream. Beside the stream stood a structure. There were several of them, but he did not know it. He had no comprehension of quantity.

He saw another creature. It resembled the beggar. His reasoning took a tremendous bound with the conception of comparison. Also it brought his attention back to himself.

Looking down he saw that he too, was shaped in the same form as that of the beggar. Except that less of his flesh was exposed. He was clothed from the shoulders to his waist with a colored garment. Another garment covered the lower half of his body. And the flesh of his hands was lighter than that of the beggar.

After a few moments of this study he had sufficient rudimentary tool to continue his first embryonic reasoning in abstraction. He desired to move. He watched the locomotion of the two visible creatures. His first attempt was successful. He walked readily and easily.

He passed a street sign which read: CALCUTTA, INDIA, British Section. The words meant nothing to him.

His system of numbers evolved simply. There was either one, or more than one. Thus he knew he was passing several buildings. He even realized that they were structures rather than natural objects.

With this simple, but great, pro

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ress came confidence. He did not now who he was or even what he as, but certainly he was equipped ith a great survival factor — rea- on. Given time to develop it, before e became overwhelmed by the com- lexities of this strange existence, here would be a possibility of his eing able to cope with the unas- ertained forces of his heterogeneous nvironment.

A primitive cunning impelled him o seek a position of observation; ne where he would be called upon o do a minimum of adjusting.

He was passing a building with reat frames of transparent material orming much of its front. Another eaningless sign read: Bachelor's lub-Hotel. Within sat creatures ressed like himself and with the ame pale flesh coloring. He went in- de and sat in a grooved object hich stood in a row of its kind fac- ig the outside. He saw that one of ie creatures rested his head against ie back of the object in which he it and with his eyes closed. None i the others paid any attention to im, while they did pay attention o each other. He rested his head ack also and closed his eyes.

Eagerly he listened to the con- ersation about him and let each ord make its impression on his un- ded brain. Each added its mite of ider and deeper concepts.

He did not realize what a magni- cent job of assimilation his mind as doing—he had no means of com- arison — but at the end of two hours he could understand much of what was being said, and he could have carried on a limited conversa- tion, if necessary.

An inborn caution warned him to accept only as much contact with these creatures as was absolutely necessary at this stage of the course of events. To him it was still a strange adventure — a very strange adventure!

Inside his coat pocket — by now he understood about the garments he wore, though he was still not cer- tain of their purpose — he found a leather wallet. Inside was a white card, lettered in black. He read the name printed there: ROBERT GRAVES. Underneath was the no- tation 1212 Aukland Road. He sur- mised that this connotated his place of residence. The name he presumed was his own.

That gave him a destination— something definite to work toward. He could not correlate the letters with the sounds of words he had heard, but he should be able to rec- ognize the street and the numbers by comparison.

CAREFULLY he planned his next actions, taking advantage of everything he had learned that would help him. When he had given his plan the best application of thought of which he was capable he left the hotel.

Each street, he found, bore rec- tangular marking plates supported by a metal pole. The sixth marker

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was lettered AUKLAND RD. He followed one way, studying closely the numbers on each building. Within a relatively short time he had figured out the pattern of the numbering system. Ten units to a group. He glanced at his hands. Ten digits. He did not know how he arrived at the reciprocal relation of the two, but it was a logical surmise.

Before leaving the hotel he had decided on one intermediate step that must be taken before he reached 1212 Aukland. He had almost passed the place he sought before he recognized it.

Three of the pale-skinned creatures stood inside the bookshop examining bound tablets of thin-sheeted substance. Several of the tablets were on display in the window. He went inside and found the tablets to be called books. He picked one at random and leafed through it as he saw others doing. No one paid any attention to him.

Within a short time he found what he sought. Now to attempt a transaction. This might be difficult. What were the steps necessary to secure ownership of the object? Did he posess anything of commensurate value with which to barter? Did they have a medium of exchange?

One of the creatures carried a book to a counter and deposited a metal disc in front of a second creature standing behind the counter. A smaller one was given in exchange and the purchaser walked out of the building with his book under his arm.

With luck he could duplicate the procedure. He walked to the table. He knew that he had several of the metal discs in his pocket. He placed them all on the table. The clerk selected five of them and shoved the remainder back. He put the change into his pocket and left with his book.

1212 Aukland was small and bore signs of deterioration. He found what must be its place of ingress and experimented with a round hard knob that protruded from it. He turned the knob and the door opened readily. Inside he found another door. Metal this time. There was the print of a hand in the metal. He placed his own hand in the print and the second door opened.

He stepped inside and found himself in a completely metal room. The room did not follow the outside contours of the building. Instantly he deducted that the wooden structure had been superimposed over the metal. Thus he stood in what must be a hollow machine.

In a corner of the room he saw one of the objects similar to that in which he had sat in the hotel. Wearily he let his body slump into it. Haven! Perhaps temporary, but at least it gave him some time to plan his future actions. He had not realized how desperately tired he was. He had been under an exhausting strain for a long time. He was grateful now for the release this

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retreat offered him. But before he allowed himself to rest he must make certain that there was nothing here to harm him while he was unguarded.

He rose and walked about the room. There was another chair — he defined it with one of the word pictures in his mind — slighter in structure than the others he had seen, but obviously of the same functional purpose. A desk somewhat like the counter in the bookstore. A square metal box rested on the desk. On the top of the box was a series of lettering. The first letters were ROBERT GRAVES. For a time this held his curiosity, but he shrugged. He would come back to it after he had had the opportunity to study his book.

Inside a drawer in the desk he found a bundle of slips of paper, darkly colored and engraved. The number 100 was printed on each corner.

A long fabric-covered frame stood against the far wall. He assumed it to be a place for reclining. He tested it gingerly. It yielded luxuriously to the contours of his body. Satisfied for the present, he closed his eyes and slept.

Robert Graves — he now associated the name-picture with himself — awoke abruptly. He was aware of a feeling of discomfort, almost of pain. After a moment he localized the source of the discomfort in his stomach. Although he had no recollection of ever having eaten he knew that he was hungry. Resolutely he subjugated the feeling to his more immediate necessity.

He rose, walked to the desk and, after giving the metal object a brief glance, picked up his book and sat in the larger of the room's two chairs.

At first he had difficulty with the book. He read the word-picture on its front: DICTIONARY. Inside he studied the printed characters until he determined their system. It consisted of twenty-six alphabetic symbols. He gave each a picture-name. With their help, and a cognitive correlation between them and the words he had learned verbally by listening to the men in the hotel, he began slowly to grasp their meaning. Soon he went so far as to associate the verbal pronunciations with the printed word. Then, as quick as the thought was born, he substituted their sounds for his word-pictures.

Once again he was not aware of the magnitude of his intellectual performance. He had no way of knowing if his achievement was either above or below the norm of capabilities of the creatures on the outside.

He did not know either that his ability to read by encompassing and assimilating as many as forty words at a glance was unusual. Nor that his memory was eidetic.

However, he did have a calm feeling of satisfaction about himself. The sentiment was not egotistical.

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He had none of the pride of possessing virtues which he had nothing to do with acquiring: His was not a self-esteem arising from his size, his strength, or his appearance. Rather it was an objective appreciation. Originally, knowing nothing about himself, he had no slightest perception of his make-up other than the superficial ones of physical attributes.

In the back of his mind he had feared that he would find himself mediocre — when he must be capable and competent. He had hesitated to reflect on his plight if he should find himself stupid, illogical, subject to panic. His reactions had gratifyingly proved otherwise. He had evidenced a remarkable facility for properly sizing up his circumstances and for coping with them with the best powers at his command. He sensed now that he had been as methodical and thorough as necessary; yet that his mind had worked with celerity and an ability, which was probably unique, to select the correct action and course of actions from the data at hand.

At the end of three hours he was half-way through the dictionary and the discomfort in his stomach had become an anguished demand.

A short block from the metal room Robert found the eating place he sought. He had no trouble ordering. Or eating. His hands manipulated the implements, as he saw the other diners do, with no difficulty.

When he paid for his meal with some of the few remaining coins in his pocket he noticed neat rows of confectionary on the counter. He bought a package of five thin, double-wrapped wafers. He unwrapped one and put it into his mouth. It was sweet to the taste but when he chewed it it refused to be masticated or dissolved by the digestive juices. He knew that it would be indigestible. He spat it out. He wondered about its purpose.

AS Robert was about to enter the metal room he saw a brown-skinned man driving past in a cart drawn by two oxen.

Back in his room he returned to work on the dictionary. When he had finished he was ready for his next step.

Pulling the smaller of the two chairs to the desk, he sat on it and read the inscription printed on the boxlike object. He read:

ROBERT GRAVES. You may ask me any questions you wish. Just be certain that each question is pertinent to your circumstances or that the answer is very important to you. The number that you may ask is limited, and if wasted may leave you without information vital to your continued existence.

This then was it. The moment for which he had prayed. But now he found that he was strangely re-

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uctant to learn about himself. Vould he be happy knowing who r what he was? There was no doubt ut that he had been placed in the resent circumstances by the pre-ieditated actions of some person or roup of persons. What had been heir purpose? What was his mis-ion? And would he be adequate to ie handling of it? Whatever he was, e knew one thing: His life was recious to him. He did not want to ie. Yet the last sentence on the box ad been filled with menace to him-elf. He sighed as he let his shoulders elax and faced the box.

There were no visible buttons, witches, or methods of control. here seemed nothing for him to do xcept ask his questions. There was o uncertainty as to what the first uestion must be.

"Who am I?" he asked.

From within the box a voice spoke, early, crisply.

"You are Shon Kage, a native of ie world Dohmet."

That told him nothing.

"Where is the world Dohmet?"

"It is contiguous to the planet you ow inhabit. It is not apparent to ou because it occupies a dimension dinarily inaccessible from that here of existence."

"Why am I here?"

"You are an operative, sent by to track down and kill the Beast, pathological criminal who escaped by fleeing to your present world."

Finally he knew. But he must ve more information or the prob-lem would be impossible of solution.

"Who is the Beast?"

"What form he has taken there we cannot know, as matter form can be changed when the passage be-tween worlds is made — as you have been changed. We can only assume that he will be found in the guise of the dominant species on that world. Otherwise, his freedom of choice and action would, of course, be very restricted."

"How will I know him when I find him?"

"Again we cannot be certain. Most of the burden of solving that must devolve on you. We can only offer clues, most of which will probably be useless to you. First, he is a kill-er. Before we tracked him down on our own world he had decimated our three billion population. How-ever, though he must be killed, your mission is not punitive. We have sent you to prevent his actions bring-ing chaos to the sphere into which he fled. One caution we can give you. Do not look for anything read-ily apparent. His methods will be insidious.

"Second," the voice went on, while Graves wondered if the box was a reasoning device, "the Machine you now occupy was sent from our world to yours. It has several unique properties. For one thing it is set to the Beast's life-pulse emanations and will always be found in close proximity — never more than five miles, as distance is measured where you are stationed. That will nar-

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row your search. In addition the Machine has an attraction for you. Wherever it goes you will be able to follow."

"I understand," Robert said. "Am I speaking directly to someone on my own world?"

"Yes. We sent this communication device through with the Machine this last trip. However, its capacity for communication is limited by the fact that it was necessary for us to maintain a delicately molecular balance in the Machine when it was sent."

"Will it be possible for me to return?"

"Yes. In the wall above your desk is a button." Robert verified the statement. "When your mission is completed press it and the Machine will do the rest."

"How did it happen that I arrived here with no past memory, and yet why do I feel as though I have lived this kind of life before?"

There was a pause. "The answer to that is not necessary to your quest. Do you wish to use valuable tape to find out?"

For the first time he realized the tremendous force his emotions exerted. He fully acknowledged the logic of the recorder's precaution yet he answered, "Yes."

"Very well. How the Beast obtained entry there we do not know. He may have arrived in full command of all his faculties. We, however, could only send you through in such a way that your brain was wiped completely clean of all past memories. We do not believe that it was injured in any way. During past years we have been successful in making brief sketchy contacts with the world you are now in. We learned one language, some of its customs, and the body form of its people. When we discovered where the Beast had escaped to, we trained operatives in the use of this language and customs.

"As our worlds are in different time continuums no time necessarily passes in your world while it is passing here, and vice versa. Therefore, we were able to train our operatives for years, until the language and actions you are now using became second nature to their organisms—trained into their very muscles and nervous systems—without losing any time there in finding the Beast. That is why your innate essense responds so readily to what you are learning there. I must warn you now that your tape has nearly run out. You have probably one more question. Two at the most."

The words hit like a blow. He knew he should weigh heavily his next question, that it must be vital. They would not be able even to warn him again. But once again his emotions dominated him. He must have the answer to this question.

"Am I alone?"

"Six operatives have been sent before you — in, and attuned to your present Machine. Your individual box, of course, was sent separate-

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ly. Had the agents been successful they would have returned — instantly, due to the differences in our time continuums. But they have not returned. You are the last we will be able to send. Unless you are successful . . ."

The voice died, as though the speaker realized that he might be wasting valuable tape.

Graves bent forward, his face etched with frantic urgency. "How will I recognize them?"

"They will . . ." The voice died with a soft whir.

Graves grabbed the box, pounded it, and raised it to throw to the floor before reason again asserted itself. Then he sagged back into his chair. Alone!

ROBERT slept once more. Before he left the Machine a second time he took the sheaf of green papers from the desk drawer. He knew now, from his study of the dictionary that they were large units of money. He counted them. Exactly twenty. A total of two thousand pounds—British denomination. This was evidently a large sum of money and should serve his purpose for some time.

He stepped outside. The cart driver and the oxen were still there. They had made no apparent progress since he entered. This struck him as odd, but he dismissed it from his mind after a moment's puzzled thought.

At his former eating place he found the same table, which he had occupied before, empty. He sat down. His waiter returned. There was a confused expression on his face as he took Robert's order. Robert remembered seeing the same man occupying the table next to him; eating the same food. He recognized other faces. Suddenly a permeating perplexity burst into acknowledged certainty. No time had passed on the outside while he had been in the Machine! That accounted for the same occupants of the eating place, for the puzzlement of his waiter, and for the driver of the oxen having made no progress while he was inside. Evidently the time continuum inside the Machine was still tied to that of Dohmet.

WHEN Robert opened the door of 1212 Aukland to enter the building, he experienced yet another excitation of his still unstable sensibilities. There was no inner-metal-door. The building was an empty husk. The Machine was gone!

He knew what must have happened. The Beast had left the city!

The voice in the box had assured him that he would be aware of the location of the Machine at all times. But he felt nothing.

He walked while he waited for some indication of the Machine's whereabouts. If he knew how recognition would come it would be easier. When darkness fell and no sign came he began to worry.

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He wondered if perhaps his mind was too keyed up to recognize the manifestation when it came. Perhaps it would come to him while he slept. He returned to the Bachelor's Club he had entered when he first appeared in the city. By now he needed rest as well.

The clerk hesitated when he proferred a hundred-pound note, but accepted it. By the next morning he still had received no communication from the Machine but he had arrived at a clear-cut decision. He was obviously a resourceful man, he thought, or he would not have been sent on such a vital mission. They had expected him to solve this in his own way. And now he knew how it must be done.

A short study of the telephone directory in his room taught him how to use it. He called the operator and asked for information. He explained that he had to leave town and asked the best means of traveling. She suggested that he try the airlines. At his request she connected him with the airlines office. He was fortunate the first try. A plane had left the day before, during the hour between his leaving the Machine and returning. Its destination was New York.

He made a reservation on another plane leaving that same afternoon. Double-checking for certainty, he called steamship offices and railroads and was assured that none had departed during the crucial hour the day before.

ON the plane the hostess treated him with a friendliness which he was certain was more than professional courtesy. He felt a pleasant discomfort when she was pleasant. To his mild surprise he recognized, for the first time, that she was a member of the opposite sex. His queer perturbation was merely his glands functioning in response to her presence.

His curiosity aroused, he looked around him, Another woman, hardly more than a girl, sat in the seat across the aisle from him. She was dark-haired with honey-colored skin. For some reason she was strangely interesting. He studied her every feature: Her blue moody eyes, her red lips, and the thin-flared nostrils which gave her features a classic profile. Through it all he felt a vitality and strength of personality. Beside her the hostess looked almost plain. He knew that she must be very beautiful. She looked up and met his observing gaze.

Unexpectedly a mood of gray obsession crept over him. Like a disinterested spectator he observed it, and wondered about its cause. Then he knew. The look she gave him was cool, completely disinterested. It told him more plainly than anything else could have done that he was not one of these people. He never would be. Perhaps his form, as it had been on Dohmet, would be freakish to them. Very probably he was still a freak among them, with merely the outer semblances of their humanity.

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Would he ever be able to return? If forced to remain here would there be a place for him? Was there any possibility of biological cooperation with the sex he now observed? Or must he walk among them, unloved and unwanted, an important misfit?

Unexpectedly Robert felt that the man in the seat beside him was sad! Wonderingly he looked at the man. Some sense within himself, unapparent but as real and sharp as vision itself, was operating. There had been no sudden "ping" of discovery, rather it was like looking through a window which he had not noticed before.

Robert looked at a passenger sitting in front of him. Here he read a bottled-up frustration. A third man exuded fear. Startled, he read hate, with the intention to do someone great bodily harm, in the mind of another passenger.

He looked at the hostess. She was still watching him and gave him a calculated smile. He read her sexual interest. He sensed also that her emotional preferences were rather promiscuous.

With awakened interest he looked at the girl to his right until she returned the look. Her emotions were quiet, subdued, with none strong enough to gain precedence. Her interest in him was not great. Disappointed he looked away.

"I have to connect with a plane to Minneapolis at New York," his seat partner said.

This time Robert was not surprised when he heard the name Minneapolis, and he knew, without the slightest doubt, where the Machine was located. Within his mind some soundless ticking, like a buried pocketpiece, was *en rapport* with the Machine itself.

"I am going to Minneapolis too," he answered.

AT the Minneapolis depot Robert hailed a taxi. Instantly he sensed that there was something about the driver that was odd. After a short pause he found that the strangeness was in the man's eyes. They were predominantly brown but blotches of green stained their pigment. And they seemed to glare with the easy hate of a wild animal. Quickly Robert read the man's emotions. He found them very commonplace.

He climbed into the cab. "Drive south," he said. He sat back and listened to the ticking in his mind that spotted the Machine. It was so clear now, that he knew the exact location of the Machine, its distance, and knew also that he would be instantly aware of any movement it might make. It would not even be necessary for him to go to it until ready.

Thirty-three blocks later he leaned forward. "Turn east at the next corner," he told the driver.

When he came in sight of the Mississippi River he paid his fare and alighted. He knew that he was very near to the Machine now—

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and also to the Beast!

From some deep source within him he was conscious of a motion of excitement and was amazed at the pleasure he felt now that the conflict would soon be joined. He knew then that he had a vein of savage ruthlessness running through him. He must bridle it with caution.

Across the street he read: BACHELOR'S CLUB, Resident Hotel The coincidence between the name and that of the hotel in Calcutta struck him as a good omen. He decided to stay there. He walked inside and registered. He took a short nap, and rose with the first shadows of night.

Now the search began. Somewhere here lurked the Beast! And he must be found.

While he ate in the Club's lunchroom Robert observed his companions closely, using his new-found supersensory faculty. All the diners were of the male sex to which the hotel catered. The servants and kitchen help were female. Robert's waitress smiled at him. By now he knew, without caring, that he was attractive to women. Oddly he read hate, in various stages, in most of the men around him.

After lunch he went down into the game room. There were several men here, most of them playing at the billiard or ping pong tables. Almost without exception they gave off their subtle efflux of hate. He must find out more about that.

Robert decided to strike up an acquaintance and see if he could learn the reason for that hate. But he must be discreet. A young man sitting alone in one of the elevated chairs overlooking a billiard table radiated a friendly disposition. There was also a strong suggestion of personal vanity. Robert decided to speak to him. He walked over to the young man and sat down in the next chair.

"Pardon me," Robert said, "my name's Robert Graves. I'm a stranger here."

The young man turned. He showed large teeth in a sardonic but friendly smile. "Welcome to the last citadel of the embattled male," he greeted, extending his hand. "My name's Jacobson. Phil, but most everybody calls me Jakie. Are you divorced, or did you learn wisdom before you were trapped?" He laughed depreciatingly.

Robert smiled back. He liked the man. "How do you mean?"

"Didn't you know? We're all women haters here."

"Not actually?"

"Seriously, most of our members are pretty sincere about it," Jacobson replied. He watched one of the players methodically make three billiards in a row. "The club was started not too long ago and the owner rather fatuously gave it the name, Bachelor's Club. Strangely, however, most of his clientele are deadly serious about it. They have pretty bitter feelings about women."

"How about yourself?" Robert

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was really interested now.

Jacobson laughed his easy laugh. "I'm afraid I'm as bad as the rest. Maybe worse. You see, I'm the owner of the Club. If you have a few minutes to spare some time, drop into my room. I'll give you a few facts about the so-called fair sex that will open your eyes."

THE next day Robert bought a small compact hand weapon — an automatic pistol, it was called. For two days he walked the streets making a hasty study of each pedestrian he met. In the evenings he studied the members of the Club. He suspected that this method might prove inadequate: The Beast probably would have his emotions well under control, and his crafty powers of simulation would be too cunning to be easily penetrated. But he had to start somewhere and, at least, he knew the Beast could not be far away. He intended gradually to widen his circle of investigation.

Robert hoped that the Beast would have something about him that would set him apart from the natives. Maybe his pattern of emotions would be different. Maybe he would show no emotions, and thus be easily detected. Robert hoped desperately for some such break.

In his spare time he studied the newspapers closely. He was a frequent visitor at the police station, investigating each criminal brought in who had committed a crime within a five-mile radius of the Club.

On the second day out he walked into a restaurant and stopped in pleased surprise. Alone at one of the tables sat the girl he had observed on the plane.

She looked up and saw him. She smiled in recognition. He walked over to her table.

"Aren't you the passenger who sat across the aisle from me on the plane from India?" she asked.

"I was hoping you'd remember me," Robert answered.

"Won't you sit down?" she invited.

"Thank you." He sat down. "I'm Robert Graves."

"And I'm Alberta Thompson." There was the friendly comaraderie about her that slight acquaintances, meeting in a new environment, always exhibited toward each other; he could feel warm friendship in her now. "Did you live in India?" she asked.

He thought quickly. "I was just returning from a sight-seeing trip," he lied.

"Oh," she readily accepted the explanation. "I was nursing at the Calcutta Memorial Hospital. I'm working for Tonneywell Manufacturing now. Still a nurse."

Something made Robert look up. An old man with a gray mustache was standing looking at them. The hate that flowed from him was almost tangible.

Instantly the question rose to Robert's mind. Could this be the Beast? The feeling died. The man's hate

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was directed at Alberta. Other than the hate his only dominant trait seemed a marked nervous stupidity.

THAT evening, while sitting with Jacobson in the latter's club, Robert saw the mustached man again. There was a black streak in the old man.

"Who is that fellow, Jakie?" Robert asked.

"One of our charter members," said Jacobson. "Name's Schultz. Been paying alimony through the nose for years now." That accounted for the old man's sour disposition.

Jacobson seemed to know, and be friendly with, everyone. He was definitely the gregarious type.

"See that pool player over there," Jacobson said, "the one with a face like a new-born baby? That's Baldie Brown, another of our pioneers."

Something about Brown fascinated Robert. His emotions were very unstable. And they ranged from high elation when he 'sunk a shot', to deep despair when the game went against him. Robert wondered if this was caused by an intoxicant.

THE sixth day Robert stood in front of the Tonneywell Manufacturing company studying the workers as they streamed out. His inspection revealed nothing out of the ordinary until a large man wearing a covert-cloth topcoat stepped out of the building. The wanton maliciousness he read in the man's emotions sickened him. Greed, avarice, and selfishness rode him heavily like a malignant mantle. This was the way Robert had imagined the Beast would appear. He decided to investigate this lead immediately.

The man stepped into a long green automobile and drove off.

Robert briefly noted the license number.

He decided that he needed help for the routine parts of his search. He couldn't let himself waste any valuable time on such checking.

In the city directory he found what he wanted.

He walked three blocks up Lake Street and entered a two-story, red brick building. On the second floor he found the number he sought. The glass pane in the door bore the simple notation: ROBERT HILL. Nothing else.

Inside he found a slim wiry man of average height sitting at a desk reading a magazine.

"Mr. Hill?" Robert asked. The figure at the desk nodded. He put down his magazine. Swiftly Robert surveyed him. He liked what he saw there: Honesty, intelligence, no undue neurotic stress, and only minor emotional strife — having to do with insufficient money to satisfy the needs or wants of himself and his family. "My name is Robert Graves."

Hill extended his hand. "What can I do for you?"

"From time to time I'll need your services," Robert said. "The work will be simple investigation, but its

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nature must be highly confidential. I will pay you one hundred dollars now," he laid the money on the desk, "and you may bill me for any additional fees or expenses. Agreed?"

Hill nodded again. He was not a very talkative man. This, also, Graves liked.

"First," Robert said. "I want you to find the owner of a car bearing the license number 178-235. Get me all the information you can about him."

"Minnesota license?" Hill asked.

"Yes."

BY the end of the first week in Minneapolis Robert had added few definite suspects to his lists. However, every slightest action of each person he met was neatly annotated and classified in his memory. Someday, he hoped, the actions of some one of them would slip together into a neat pattern and he would have tracked down the Beast. When that time came he would be prepared to strike without mercy.

The seventh night he took Alberta to a movie. It was only their second date but they walked to her home hand in hand. Already they were silent when together with that silence of understanding. He knew that she liked him more each time they met. He knew also that he loved her. And that he was being very foolish. This was a diversion from the job ahead of him and he had no right to let himself be diverted — by anything. Furthermore, he would have to leave her as soon as he was successful. And — his old gray obsession returned while he was the happiest he had ever been on this world— maybe I'm a freak to her, he thought.

When he left Alberta that night his animal tissues demanded action to dispell the frustration in his mind. He decided to find the Machine. He might need it at anytime.

Already he had a fairly good idea of its location.

He walked to the bank of the Mississippi. The rock cliffs were steep but he had found a path the third day he arrived. Now he followed the path down under the Lake Street bridge. The night was dark but by the faint light that reached him from the bridge lamps he could see the giant cement abutments out in the river.

A five-foot iron sewer-pipe burrowed back into the rock. He had come this far the third day but two youngsters standing at the mouth of the pipe, hallooing into it and listening to the reverberations of their voices, had made him decide to return at night. He knew he was very near.

Forty yards farther a side path branched upward. He followed it to a wide rock ledge. Grass and shrubs grew on the top of the ledge. It was a very lonely place this late at night. Somewhere on the bank above a dog kept up a steady barking. Unhesitatingly Robert walked through the high shrubs toward the

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cliff. He bent his body forward and walked into a natural cave. When he had left the last dim vistages of light he felt along the walls with his hands.

The wall beneath his hand rounded and became smooth. He had arrived! He groped his way to the door and fitted his hand into the print. The door opened and a lance of light gashed the darkness. Briefly he wondered at the source of the light. He hadn't paid attention to it before because he had been there in the daylight, but the Machine had no windows, and no openings other than the door. He stepped inside.

Cursorily he examined the room. Everything appeared as he had left it. The communication box was still on the desk.

"What do I do now?" he asked the box. He did not expect an answer. Therefore he was not disappointed when none came.

Unexpectedly he realized that he was very tired. This, he reasoned, was because he had returned to his haven; the one place where he could relax the tense virility of his mind, and feel very safe. In here reality paused.

He lay on the couch. Just as he was about to fall asleep a passage from one of the few books he had read since coming to this world drifted in front of his memory's eye. The book had been written by a man named Bertrand Russell.

My own belief is that a conscious thought can be planted in the unconscious if a sufficient amount of vigor and intensity is put into it. I have found for example, that, if I have to write upon some rather difficult topic, the best plan is to think about it with very great intensity — the greatest intensity of which I am capable — for a few hours or days, and at the end of that time give orders, so to speak, that the work is to proceed under ground. After some time I return to the topic, consciously, and find that the work has been done.

Lord knows I've given this matter enough intense thought, he smiled as he dropped off to sleep.

When he awoke he had the answer to part of his problem. Somewhere, sometime — since he had come to this city—he was certain that he had made contact with the Beast!

BACK in the Club Robert found a message waiting for him. It was from Hill asking him to call. He stepped into a booth and telephoned.

"Hill speaking," the voice said.

"This is Graves."

"Oh yes, Mr. Graves. Your man's name is Adam Johnson. He's the executive manager of Tonneywell. He holds several other important offices: Director of the First Bank; Regent of the University, and such. Do you want me to enumerate

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them?"

"No. What is his social background?"

"He's married. Father of two children. Both boys. He was born in Minneapolis, and lived here all his life."

"Is there any record of his ever having been in India?"

"None that I found. Do you want me to investigate that angle more thoroughly?"

"Yes, and call me back as soon as you have definite information."

AGAINST his better judgment Robert continued seeing Alberta. He was certain now that she loved him. Especially after an incident that happened while they were walking along the Mississippi bank.

He had been looking at an ore boat in the river when some hyperrational faculty of his intricate nervous system sounded an urgent alarm. He turned just in time to grab Alberta as she fell toward him. Her shoulder had been about to hit him in the back. The blow would have certainly knocked him over the bank and onto the rocks a hundred feet below. She would probably have fallen with him.

As he held her in his arms she sobbed brokenly. "Oh, Robert, I might have killed you!" she cried. "I might have killed you! I stumbled on a stone."

He kissed away her tears, and held her until the horror of the near disaster wore off. They stood close together and the warmth of her flesh came through her clothes into his hands. "I love you," she said. She kept her eyes averted, but he read within her how deeply she meant it.

ROBERT returned to his room elated. The elation did not last long.

Sometime during the night the throbbing clamor of his premonition awoke him and he lay with his eyes wide open, his brain tense and alert. He felt nothing and heard nothing, yet his very tissues cried with alarm. Then his stomach retched, and nausea filled him with sickness. He rose and turned on the light.

Swiftly he looked about him. The window which he had left open was plugged with an old overcoat. A red rubber tube led from the outside into the room. Instantly he knew what was happening. Someone was trying to poison him with gas.

The greater implication hit with a force that threatened to overwhelm him with its awful propensities. The Beast had found him!

His brain seemed divided into two parts. While one segment quivered with a tocsin fear that was worse because it could not see what it feared, the other part accepted the fear as a stimulation that quickened his reflexes. It planned swiftly ahead as it commanded him to dress, and to hold each breath as long as possible. He even took time to make his bed and to straighten the room,

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to give the appearance that it had not been used that night.

When he left he went down the back stairs. No one saw him. With luck the Beast would not realize that he knew about the attempt at his life. That gave him some small chance. God knows it was little enough. The Beast had spotted him while he in his turn had nothing except vague suspicions.

Outside the hotel he walked rapidly away from the Club — figuratively seeing the glint of the Beast eyes in every shadow. Tonight death breathed in the very air.

The time had come for him to act. But where to direct that action? There were two ways he could move. He could pick his likeliest suspect and strike swiftly, ruthlessly, and pray that he was right. That would mean Johnson.

Or he could start at the top and work down, giving each his best in as short a time as possible.

If the Beast was convinced that he had not returned to his room, that he was still unaware of being discovered, then he had some hope. He decided to take the latter choice of action.

As soon as the first light of day returned he called Hill — from a public booth.

"Did you find anything more on Johnson?" Robert asked.

"Nothing much," Hill's voice sounded sleepy. "As far as I could determine, he's never been to India. Do you want me to continue?"

"No. There won't be time. Now, listen closely. I want you to go to Mound. Stay in the lobby of the Mound Hotel until I contact you. Very probably I'll send a man out to you. When he gets there, give him a package. I don't care what you put into it. Just give it to him. Have you got that?"

"Yes."

"Good luck."

"Goodbye."

Robert went to the Radisson Hotel and registered under the name of George Jones. There was nothing he could do except kill time until his suspects returned from work that evening. He lay back on his bed and rested. His body, not his mind.

AT six o'clock Robert rented an automobile at a 'drive yourself' agency. He was supposed to take Alberta to a movie that evening. At first he had decided to call and ask for a postponement. On second thought, it would save explanations if he picked her up.

She came out when she saw him stop in front of her apartment.

"I'm going to have to ask you to trust me, and not ask any questions," he said, without preliminaries, when she sat in the car. "I want you to go to the show without me. I have something that I must do. If I can make it I'll join you in the movie. Trust me?"

She hesitated barely perceptibly. "Of course," she said. She asked

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nothing more.

Wonderful girl, he thought. He rested his hand on her clenched ones for a moment. He parked the car on a side street. He watched her as she walked to the corner of Lake and turned to the right. The theater was a block down.

After a moment he followed to the corner and turned left toward the Club.

Down in the game room he spotted his man. He wasted no time.

"Mr. Schultz," Robert said. "I'd like to ask you a favor. Are you busy this evening?"

Schultz met his gaze sourly. Small wrinkles deepened at the corners of his eyes. Robert read crafty suspicion.

"It's worth fifty dollars to me," Robert said, pulling out his wallet. "I'll give you twenty-five to drive to Mound and pick up a package for me. When you return I'll give you the other twenty-five." He pulled out bills. If Schultz was human he would accept the offer. If he refused . . . then Robert would know.

"Where is your car?" Schultz asked. The insatiable greed for money that was almost universal guided him now.

"You'll find it around the corner. A blue convertible."

He had things in motion now. Next step was to get to the Machine. Mound was ten miles from here. If Schultz went to Mound — Hill would verify that — and the Machine did not move, then he was not the Beast.

Robert returned to his room. The explosion shook the building!

It took him only an instant to realize what had happened. The trap was closing. The Beast was coming in for the kill. It was not fear that froze him now. Rather it was a black frustration and the influx of a plethora of emotions that literally overwhelmed him with their complexities. It was almost five minutes before he could plan his next counteraction.

He took his revolver out of a bureau drawer and slipped it into his inside coat pocket. Then he went downstairs.

"What was that loud noise?" he asked the night clerk, the only person remaining in the lobby.

"There was an explosion around the corner. A bomb blew up an automobile. The driver was a resident —named Schultz."

"Was he hurt?"

"Schultz is dead."

Robert bowed his head. Schultz, after all, had been innocent. And he was dead. Other men might die before it was over, but there was no turning back.

Next on the list was Brown. He went down into the game room. Brown was standing at a window looking out. There was a billiard cue in his hand.

"Mr. Brown," Robert said. "I know this is unusual, but I wonder if I could impose on you to do me a favor?"

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"A favor?" The words weren't registering too clearly. "Poor Schultz," Brown said.

Robert took a fifty dollar bill out of his pocket. "Would this be worth your while to take a bus to Mound and pick up a package for me?"

Brown reacted instantly. There was nothing slow about his reflexes. He took the bill. "Be glad to do you a favor," he said. "Where do I pick up this package?"

"You will get it from a man by the name of Hill at the Mound Hotel."

After he saw Brown on the bus Robert went down to the Mississippi and crouched in the mouth of the cave where he could watch the Machine.

He allowed one hour. The Machine did not move.

Climbing to the top of the river bank he walked back toward the Club. He arrived just in time to see Brown getting off a bus. Robert stepped into a convenient doorway. Brown did not see him.

At a pay-booth he called the Mound Hotel and asked to have Hill paged.

Hill's modulated voice said, "Yes?"

"Graves. Did a man pick up the package?"

"He did. A short man. Exactly twenty-seven minutes ago."

"Thank you. I won't need you again for awhile. But I'd like to have you return to your office and wait, just in case I want you in a hurry."

That eliminated the outstanding suspects. In fact it left him in a position where any one of a hundred would be as likely as another. He needed time. And a place to hide. He knew where to get them both.

BACK in the Machine Robert stared at the ceiling, wide awake, but at a dead end. Perhaps Johnson was still in town. He could have left a trail indicating that he'd gone out of town. Or even Brown could have sent someone else to pick up the package. He would act in some such subtle way if he were really the Beast. Robert wished he had thought to ask Hill for a more complete description. Before he left here again he must be certain of his every future move, and — if at all possible —the individual he must move against.

At the end of several hours he still had arrived at no definite course of action. And he had thought so long and so hard that his brain was no longer functioning at its usual peak efficiency. He decided to sleep. He had all the time in the world while he was in here.

Maybe the Russell method would work for him again.

IT did. When he awoke he knew who the Beast was. There would have to be a minimum of checking, but the pieces fit together so neatly that he had no doubt but that he was right.

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The fierceness which he had discovered in himself thrilled to the anticipation of the fight to come, and it was strengthened by a cold-blooded determination.

Outside he phoned Hill. He waited for his return call in the drug-store from which he phoned.

He was half-way through a second malted when the telephone rang.

When he walked out of the drug-store the last vestiges of doubt were gone.

But this time he needed help. Hill would not do. He returned to the Club.

Jacobson was in his room and invited him up when Robert rang.

Robert used the stairway. He reviewed exactly the way his account must be given so that Jacobson would believe.

"Jakie," Robert said, "I'm going to tell you a story. I want you to set your mind to believe it even though it will sound so fantastic to you that it would ordinarily be absurd. But it will be true."

Jacobson let the smile fade from his cheeks, but his pumpkin-shaped face still gave the impression of smiling. He peered intently at Robert through his thick-lensed glasses. They made his eyes appear large and bulging.

"I'll start at the beginning," Robert said. "And tell you the story detail by detail. That is the only way there will be any chance of your believing me. If I tried to make it brief, you'd recommend a psychiatrist."

"Go ahead," Jacobson said. "If there's anything that I can do, I'll be glad to help you."

Robert told his story. Surprisingly it did not sound so fantastic as he had imagined it would. Many of its particular items were implausible sounding but taken all together they had the ring of truth. When he was finished he thought Jacobson should be convinced.

After a long moment Jacobson asked, "This isn't some pipe-dream you've cooked up because of a fight you've had with Alberta, is it? Of course, it isn't," he answered his own question. "I know you are sincere. But Bob," Jakie's voice was gentle, "you mentioned a psychiatrist. It could be possible . . . "

"It isn't," Robert interrupted.

"I believe you," Jacobson said. "What do you intend to do?"

Robert told him.

"Where do I come in on this?"

"I can handle the situation myself—I think," Robert said. "But just in case I don't make it, I want you to take over. The Beast must be stopped! It shouldn't be too hard now that its identity is known. I'd suggest that you not try to handle it alone. The safest thing to do would be to publicize it as widely, and as quickly as possible. That way will be the safest for you also."

They shook hands and Robert left.

AT Alberta's house he found her alone.

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"I'd like to show you something," he said. "Would you mind driving me in your car?"

There was a question in her eyes. When he said nothing further she shrugged. "I'll have to get my coat," she said.

He started to insist that she remain with him, but decided it would be safer not to arouse her suspicions.

They drove past Fort Snelling, across the bridge, and turned off on the highway to Prior Lake.

A mile down the road they came to a gravel-pit.

"Stop here," Robert said.

Before she could take her hands from the wheel he pressed the gun in his pocket against her ribs.

"Don't move," he ordered.

"Please excuse this necessary familiarity," he said. The tone was grave and there was no humor in it. Briskly he went over her body, searching for weapons. He found a small derringer pistol tucked in the top of the stocking on her right leg. He slipped it into his other coat pocket.

Now they were two strangers face to face; so close that he could see his reflection in her eyes. The golden flesh of her face showed sallow and very naked. He mouth narrowed to a slit and she seemed to settle within herself. He read that she was deadly afraid, but the only outward sign she gave of it was her quickened breathing.

"Get out of the car," Robert said. He followed her out.

"Walk slowly toward the gravel-pit," he directed.

They walked until a bend in the road hid them from the highway.

"This is far enough," Robert said.

Alberta turned then to speak but when she opened her mouth her throat seemed to tighten and she made only a small wincing sound. He sensed then the awful agony of fear within her as her thoughts leaped ahead to what was to come and he pitied her in this moment.

She raised her head, angry with herself for showing this fear, and angry with him for seeing it. She found her voice and flung it at him. "You've beaten me," she said, "and you'll kill me now. But look back on this time once in a while and see if you could have done it any better if you were in my place."

"Lie on your stomach," Robert said.

Alberta said nothing more. She did not cry or beg for her life, as he had half expected. Quite a girl, he thought. She got down on her knees. She rested her hands on the dried clay and gravel and lowered her body to the ground.

"Turn your head toward the gravel-pit," Robert told her.

She obeyed.

"Now I want you to lie absolutely still," he warned. "Don't move a muscle. Your life will depend on it."

Robert backed into a niche in the pile of gravel. He crouched and sat on his heels.

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As time dragged slowly past with not a sound to break the stillness, excitement gathered in a tight knot in his stomach. Perspiration formed on his face and made a dry stinging on his cheeks.

They waited for five long minutes, neither moving, until Robert began to fear that he had figured wrong, before the sound came.

It was the scuff of a leather boot in the gravel. An instant later Jacobson came into sight. He saw Alberta and walked softly over to her.

Suddenly alarm flared high in his face and he jerked his head up. There was a terrible realization of his fate in his eyes as they sought Robert out. Robert's bullet caught him squarely in the forehead and his body staggered as though hit by a weight. Shocked unbelief was on his features as he dropped.

"You may get up now, Alberta," Robert said. "The Beast is dead!"

"*He* is the Beast?" Alberta asked in bewilderment. "But I thought . . . "

"That I was the Beast?" Robert interrupted. "I am an operative from Dohmet—the same as you are."

"Good God," Alberta exclaimed. "And to think that I tried to kill you. I might have succeeded!"

"I know," Robert said softly, "but it's all right now." He took her in his arms.

"How did you know?" she asked.

"Many things pointed to it, after I began suspecting him," Robert replied. "Such as the fact that he returned from India shortly before we did. But the main clue was the Bachelor's Club. And the one in Calcutta."

"Bachelor's Club?"

"Yes. Jacobson is the owner.

"How did that point to him?" Alberta still did not understand.

"His designs, of course, were not too self evident," Robert said. "But I think I can explain them to you. He probably started his Clubs in various places throughout the world. He had some method—whether drug, hypnotic, or otherwise, I do not know, but it was evidently very effective—for killing the sex urge in males. You can see what this would mean genetically. He would lessen the number of the race by the simple process of eliminating that breeding desire.

"Moreover," Robert continued, "his method was double-pronged. The sexes of any species have a natural antagonism toward each other. Here they flippantly label it 'the battle of the sexes.' With men unrestrained by their biological urge that antagonism would flare up into a frightful thing."

"But could one man do so much damage among such a vast number of people?" Alberta asked.

"If he hadn't been killed there would soon have been many more just like him," Robert answered. "Each Club was like a breeding cell. After its members became thoroughly enough indoctrinated he would have taught them his methods and they would have spread like

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germs, carrying their venom with them. Each member was another potential Beast."

In stunned wonder, at the monstrous possibilities, they looked at each other.

Then—"We have a long way to go, to get back home," Alberta said.

"A long way, but a speedy one," Robert answered. "The Machine is waiting."

THE END

SPECIAL FEATURES

THIS special section of OTHER WORLDS is for your own participation and enjoyment. Here you will find your letters to the editor; your jokes (for which we will pay $1 each); your personal messages to your fellow readers (published free); reviews of science fiction books worthy of your attention; the latest news of what's going on in the world of authors, editors, rival magazines, fan clubs, even individual readers; your bookshop; cartoons; fact articles; interviews with individuals in the public eye and many others. If you have any suggestions as to improvements and additional features, remember your word is our golden rule.

The MAN From TOMORROW

When we began this new feature in OTHER WORLDS, we didn't quite expect the furore that has arisen over it - - and then again, we did. It's in the wide ramifications that we are surprised. Perhaps in this issue we ought to do a little explaining, and analysis of what's happened.

To begin with, we might quote a few letters from readers: Says Mrs. Doris Saunders, 20 Hillside Ave., San Anselmo, Calif. "Thank you also for your articles, The Man From Tomorrow. Needless to say, they have been most enjoyed."

That is a surprise! The articles are a source of pleasure. They are enjoyable. Certainly that is one good reason to publish them, then.

Says Juanita Y. Fogle, 632 N. Illinois, Arl, Va., "I have all of my friends (anti-SF readers too) on edge waiting for the predictions, each issue. I have a huge map which I mark for each prediction about certain cities, states and countries."

So they cause tension, excitement, and participation, to the extent of keeping track on a map! Reason number two for continuing them.

Carbee E. Roache, 44 Cottage St.,

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Littleton, N.H.: "After reading the column, I was intrigued as never before by the fantastic (?) predictions therein. It is my opinion that no one would have the unheard-of gall to predict such world-rending events as you have unless he is either crazy or has some at least semi-reliable source of information that dishes out this stuff. I prefer to believe the latter. Having no previous experience with your mag, I don't know if your source of information is public or private knowledge. If it is public, I wish you would let me in on it. I would like to know where you get (or claim to get) all your information, for how long the feature has run, and about the percentage of correct predictions. Also whether I can get back issues containing them."

Well, to repeat, our source is a still, quiet, hard-to-hear little voice in our mind. We've described it as two things; a man from 500 years in the future; our imagination. We think it's our imagination. But if so, then how would we account for a high percentage of *accuracy*. When the figures are in, then we'll do some more "rationalizing" about it. If it's imagination, we'll hit no better than anybody with an imagination, or anybody who is just "guessing". If we beat, say, Criswell and his famous 87% correct predictions, then we've got a problem on our hands. Or on our minds! Let's take this seriously and see how it comes out.

Roy Armstrong, Rt. 8, Box 623, Tucson, Arizona: "I've just read in your magazine that the army has sent a rocket to the moon, and another will be sent this summer. Now, is this the *absolute* truth? If so, how did you get the information? It wasn't published in any of the papers or the AP and UP would have had it in papers all over the world. It couldn't be top secret because, by publishing it in your mag it would cease to be a secret. But if it was true, will you please tell me if the rocket was manned or unmanned. They used rockets, I presume?" Well, the source is as in the foregoing - - my own head. No wonder it wasn't in the newspapers! As for being manned, no. But what *was* in the papers was a story about a Wac-Corporal Booster rocket at White Sands that did not come down. Was that the rocket in question? Another thing that was in the paper about three years ago was that it would be possible to fire an unmanned rocket to the moon in two or three years. Still a third thing in the papers was the appearance of a "strange object" near the earth, seen by a South American astronomer, who has since gone through such a campaign of ridicule, especially by fellow astronomers, that he has been forced to say he mistook something for something else. We think the fuss raised was just a bit overdone. So, *now* we are rather certain the man from tomorrow was right!

William Hecht, 8444 Lackland

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Ave., Overland 14, Mo.: "Your Man From Tomorrow is one of the most challenging articles to the human race since Nostradamus. In line with your predictions, the noted London seer, "Cheiro", gave some predictions back in 1934 to cover the next 30 years. Would you care to confirm or reject his predictions? Here are some of the cardinal predictions. 1. England will suffer terribly in the 3rd war and east coast will be destroyed by planes from Russia. 2. A new Irish republic will be formed and will bomb Liverpool, Manchester and West of England. 8. Axis of the earth to be changed - - severe earthquakes to take place as crust changes. 4. An Earthquake will develop from Peru through Panama, Mexico, the U.S. and Canada. Washington D.C., Buffalo, Boston and Toronto will be seriously affected and considerable part of New York City to be destroyed. 5. A new belt of land will appear in the North Atlantic diverting the Gulf stream and making England, Sweden, Norway, Germany and Russia much colder; China, India, Africa to have a temperate climate. 6. An upheaval will cause the lost continent of Atlantis to reappear and its ruins will be explored. 7. The Sahara Desert will be transformed into a great inland sea and Egypt and Palestine will become a great center of civilization."

Well, I don't know . . . But Nostradamus beat Cheiro to it regarding prediction 1. I personally doubt if the Irish will ever bomb anybody. A change of the Earth's axis is not indicated. It is an impossibility, and contrary to theory, it has never happened. Earthquakes, yes. No eastern cities will be damaged in this manner. They are outside the areas of the great faults. No new land in the Atlantic. No reappearance of Atlantis. But research will be made beneath the ocean, and remnants of unheard-of civilizations will be found. The Sahara will not become a sea, but will become usable farm land, with grasses the chief crop. Egypt will never become a center of civilization, although Palestine will become a center of great military technology and activity. It will breed war as long as it exists.

Now, says Joseph Semenovich, 40-14 10th St., Long Island City, N.Y. "I question you about your predictions - - if I may call them that. To me, they seem to be "grab at anything, you're bound to be right once." When someone depicts the future, I have always thought his prophecies were arrived at by logical reasoning. One of your predictions has already taken a flop. The one saying Truman was going to win in '52 is wrong. But actually, I can't say that. Who knows, Harry may still decide to run and fool us all by winning. He did in '48. Your predictions about the peace conferences failing is sensible. Grass will grow in the desert! Which desert? Every desert? If you haven't any information, then the prophecy is just a

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hap-hazard guess. Where the information that Vesuvius will erupt in '53? The only way you can say that is if you have studied some graphs relating to the subject. If you just said it because you felt like saying it, you are just guessing. Now the most preposterous - - Civil War will rage in the United States! Now I know you are talking through your hat. The federal government is getting stronger and stronger every year. I'm still laughing. What are you trying to do, scare the hell out of us? And then comes the statement we'll have a war with Canada. Then you say we will have a war with Russia. How can we? Russia, if what you said is true, will bomb us as soon as we are fighting a civil war. They will also bomb us when we are having a war with Canada. How can we survive? Where did you get the information that great archeological discoveries will be made? If you are going to make astounding guesses, how about making some that do us some good, and not all bad? Make men feel proud, and not low. Then you'll get somewhere. They'll try, since you said it in your predictions, to be good! The Catholic Church will be all-powerful. The way I see it, it won't. More people now than ever before are drifting away from the church. How can it rule when there are other religions, many more religions? In Asia there are many more people who believe in Allah than Christ. In Europe, most of it is communistic, that is, atheists. France will go communist. What will the church have? Italy? I doubt it—it may soon become communist. Germany? That is Protestant. Spain? Never, not with Franco in. So how is the Church going to run things? What I think is that in another hundred years there will be no church. If what you say may be true, then don't forget not to exclude Other Worlds. Your magazine should fold if a civil war starts—or any other war. Your predictions haven't any connections. They are all different, and if one occurs, the other cannot. Predict things that are believable, that are logical, that have some reasoning behind them."

Your point is *our* point! If we are just guessing, our percentage will be bad! We've got to wait until we get that percentage! We're trying to be scientific, use the scientific method, give this an actual *laboratory* test! Naturally you will have to be patient while we do it. You are being very unscientific in your requests. Why should we deliberately try to predict nice things? Because you want to hear them? I'm afraid you'll be due for a lot of rude awakenings in life with that kind of philosophy. Then you add that if we predict nice things, people will try to live up to them! Then why not say that if we predict bad things, people will try to *avoid* them! What if you are RIGHT about what people will do because of predictions? Maybe we're not so dumb! Yes, when

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I said deserts, I meant every desert. And just a few weeks ago, it came out that there *are* plans in existence to seed desert areas to grass by means of a new type seed spread by plane! Score another for the man from Tomorrow! Why is it preposterous that civil war will come to the U. S.? A precedent has already been established? And if civil war did come, where would Canada stand? Perhaps on one side or the other—and in that event, would intervene, if only by request—or by reason of existing mutual security pacts. Do you doubt such pacts exist? The Church? You OMIT the *only* country where such power is possible, the United States! And the Catholic church is the most powerful church in America, by far! A world-powerful America means a world-powerful church! You see no reasoning there? Look again. You say our predictions have no connections. Be explicit. Make men feel proud, not low, you say? Let's be trite, let's quote some trite sayings: "Pride goeth before a fall." "The Meek shall inherit the Earth." Yet you want us to foster pride, and decry humility! Are you *really* proud of what we've done with this world so far? When you say the Federal government is becoming ever stronger, aren't you pointing right *at* that Civil War?

In a rapid count, we find that at least 20 of our predictions have already come true. Most of them have had no time to come true as yet. At least two have definitely not come true. But the percentage so far seems to be about 90% plus. In about a year we can arrive at a very good percentage for all predictions involving 1951-52, which will give us something to argue upon.

In our next issue we'll attempt to give a series of predictions which we've hesitated to print up to now, because we wanted to try to confirm them. Some of them we will never print, because they were of such short notice that they happened before we could get into print, but we are making a personal score of those, for our own information.

Our main trouble has been that we often appear too late for short-range predictions, and long-range ones are interesting, but too far away to mean anything to us.

Let's call this an interesting game, until we can get more definite figures. And keep your letters coming. We'll answer what we can in the column.

Meanwhile, you might stock up on canned goods. Food prices will hit an all-time high in 1952, and the 1952 crops will be the biggest disappointment to Washington of the whole year. And yes, OTHER WORLDS will be out of business because of the sweep of events. And so will you, brother! Why do you think we moved up into the wilds of Wisconsin? Away from big, naughty Chicago?—*Rap.*

THE END

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LETTERS

BRYAN J. OGBURN

After reading your letter to Paul Fairman I feel, for the first time, that I have really come to know you as a distinct personality. You will have to admit that some of your answers and comments, viewed in the light that Paul used, did sound rather psychotic. After reading the "chewing out" that you gave a certain reader about ASF I felt the same way. Your answer to Paul and that answer to H. M. Drake in the April OW has caused me completely to revise my opinion of you.

I am what is generally known as a peon in SF fan circles; we peons rarely have letters in the editors' incoming mail box, we, generally, have nothing to do with the fanzines for we read and judge on our individual tastes. True to form, I have never regarded SF personalities as exceptional critters, however, at this time I would give my collection of Scientific American magazines and my autographed copy of Halliburton's *Royal Road* to meet you personally. I'll wager that you would make a very interesting conversationalist. Hmm-m you would not want to join us in Taperespondence International would you?

After mentally kicking myself for drawing a conclusion without enough evidence to make it valid, I can't help thinking that Paul Fairman must feel silly as hell.

I need some enlightenment concerning the nature of the "Shaver Mystery" and its implications. Since I am a relatively recent proponent of SF, I have heard some facets of the "Mystery" cursed and defended but never explained well enough to get anything but a distorted view of the situation. I would appreciate any directions that would enable me to obtain the particulars about the Shaver Mystery.

1005 S. 7th St.,
Waco, Texas

I'd sure like to join, as I like to shoot off my mouth, but I just wouldn't have the time, and I haven't a tape recorder. Must get one . . . No, Paul Fairman didn't feel silly as hell. As a matter of fact, he came to Chicago, and we had a nice visit with him; going down to meet him and Lila Shaffer, Managing Editor of Amazing and Fantastic. By the way, Paul's now with Howard Browne, who stole him away from IF! About this Shaver Mystery—we print his stories, but the Mystery just isn't a mystery with us. Maybe the best way to clear the thing for you who want the answers, is to publish a book! Ah! Paul Fairman, you were right—I am a super salesman! I will publish a book. Now if only you guys will buy it . . . ! But really, the thing is too complex and has no place in a magazine. As for the

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controversy over it, it's bloody! We don't want to shed no blood.—Rap.

W. J. BARNES

Just got my June copy of OTHER WORLDS on my subscription. I have noticed several readers who comment on receiving and having perfect copies from the news stand. I have, to date, never received a copy of any mag from the stand in any better condition, and usually they are pretty bad off by the time I can get around. That nice envelope seems to do the trick. I am now VERY GLAD I took you up on the subscription offer. Thanks for telling me about it.

Box 45
McCrory, Ark.

There you are! We send subscription copies in heavy manilla envelopes, not just wrapped in a piece of brown paper! You get your copy perfect. Why not everybody subscribe!—Rap.

THE HUBBARD DIANETIC FOUNDATION, INC.

As a reader of OTHER WORLDS and as one of those individuals close to the fountainhead of dianetic progress, I would like to try to clarify a point or two upon which you seem to have some misconception, if one is to judge by your answer to Clara de Paula Lopes' letter in April, 1952 OTHER WORLDS.

Glittering like tiny diamonds among your otherwise disparaging remarks about Dianetics are connotations which indicate that you accept the validity of the infant science—such as ". . . to place such *advanced psychiatry* in the hands of immature persons . . . " (ital. mine). Also your very first sentence.

You have stated that your principle objection is Dianetics' lack of originality, and that the real credit is due to Freud. Mr. Hubbard is the first to recognize and publicly state that he owes a great debt not only to Freud, but many others who have worked in the field of human thought. There is a plaque hanging conspicuously in the Foundation lobby dedicated to Freud and others who had the original thinking from which Dianetics came into being. Never, to my knowledge, has Hubbard stated that his work is completely original; he has, however, and with much justification, stated that his compilation of the *pertinent* facts and the origination of techniques with which to work are solely his.

Concerning the possible danger of a knowledge of Dianetics in the hands of unscrupulous or immature individuals, you have a valid point. But it is a point which is true in all branches of knowledge. A know-how of atomic fusion or fission necessarily confers upon the knower the power of good or evil in its use. The knowledge, so elementary in this era, of how to drive a car confers upon the individual doing the driving the power of using his knowledge for good or evil. A know-

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er may be careless of his or with his knowledge and not be genuinely evil, and yet wreak incalculable damage. But in the overall progress of mankind it is criminal in the extreme for a "selected" band of the "right" individuals to keep tight control on any strata of knowledge. In fact, it cannot be done for very long.

Do you not suppose our present avowed enemy across the waters has long had a knowledge of a technique that bends men's wills to theirs no matter what the strength of character the unfortunate captive might have had originally? It hasn't been many months since a highly publicized man was held captive in one of the satellite countries and made to confess to crimes he did not commit. How does this evil government obtain "confessions" from priests and bishops whose ideals and ethics are well known for their purity? It is through the use of pain-drug-hypnosis that their efforts are successful—and as they have perfected this method of producing human zombies isn't it like a ray of sunshine in a dank prison to know that through Dianetic techniques such vcious practice has met its counter-measure? For through the use of Dianetics and Dianetics only can restoration of such an unfortunate individual's self-determinism be affected! Suppose—attention, stf writers: a plot!—a picked group of saboteurs were dropped inside our country one dark night, and proceeded to methodically apply pain-drug-hypnosis to key members of a city such as Chicago? PDH leaves no tell-tale marks. Its application is forgotten completely by the unfortunate victim, but the victim then obeys implicitly any order given during the beating. And can be easily made to obey subsequent orders over the radio! Surely you and the writers can take it from there.

Can you picture present-day psychiatry mobilized against such an insidious attack? Three thousand odd psychiatrists, hard-working sincere individuals though they are, would be a futile battalion to counter the effects of such a *coupe*. Their techniques require *years* for fulfillment—Dianetics does an equivalent (and usually better) job of bringing an unconscious command into analytical reach *within the space of a few hours*.

During the last war the top-secrets of Radar and Radar Countermeasures *had* to be disseminated among picked individuals. When a non-com is given top-secret information, it is no longer considered top-secret, but must be reduced in classification. A few well-indoctrinated officers could not possibly have combatted or countered the know-how of Germany and Japan in the field of Radar; surely you recognize the futility of such stratification.

The thesis I have advanced is not an impossibility—top-level intelligence in our country is aware of the danger of just such a possibility.

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And Dianetics is here as the counter-measure.

But its greatest use right now is in affording relief to the hundreds of thousands of individuals suffering from neuroses and psychoses. Three thousand psychiatrists (which I believe is the recognized number of qualified doctors in the U.S. in this field) cannot hope to cope with such a prodigious task. Even if it didn't take from two to five years for them to effect a *release*, three-thousand is a discouragingly inadequate number of practitioners.

And finally, in answer to your mention of a single case mentioned in the newspapers two years ago—this particular case is discussed fully in Hubbard's SCIENCE OF SURVIVAL. Briefly, the wife of the student of Dianetics who murdered her husband and herself was, long before Dianetics came upon the scene, a psychotic. She had been under treatment by "recognized" psychiatry, to no avail. Two previous suicide attempts were in her case record. As a last resort this man, who loved his wife dearly and would leave no stone unturned in his quest for her mental health, took up Dianetics, and *against the advice* of Hubbard and others, took it upon himself to process his own wife. That he did not succeed is attested to by the newspaper story, but your statement that he was "her psychic master" is unfounded. Such reporting is much like the fanatic clergy that lifts one sentence from one verse in the Bible and quotes it as proof of their sole right to teach the Word of God.

You were quite right about the intelligence level necessary to become a good dianetic auditor. But I proudly state that the *average* dianetic auditor is far more capable of understanding and dealing with a psychosomatic disability or a neurosis than is today's recognized psychiatry! I am not alone in making this statement — "recognized" psychiatrists who have left the practice of their profession to use dianetic techniques exclusively attest to this, heartily. (I will gladly forward any letters you care to write to one or more of these individuals.) Naturally, such names are not for publication at this time, since these individuals do not wish to lose their status in the American Medical Association. Such a feeling is not cause for looking down on psychiatry as a profession. They are, as a whole, a sincere, hard-working group who themselves are, because of their many failures and the consequent psychic "scar" such a failure inflicts, often in need of dianetic therapy! (I recall an M.D. who was relieved by Dianetics of a severe palsy of the hands which had been brought on because of a few deaths of patients he had tried with heart and soul to cure with surgery.)

Dianetics is here to stay. And the more competent auditors we can train the greater will be the level

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of sanity in our future world. Dianetics has been laughingly called "the poor man's psychiatry." It is a tragic circumstance in our society when one must be rich in order to afford needed psychic help!

Waldo T. Boyd
Director of Publications
211 W. Douglas Ave.
Wichita 2, Kansas

We present this letter by the man who should know! Let that settle the question. It must be clear now that we don't disagree with dianetics as a science, but it doesn't belong in a stf mag! Thanks, Mr. Boyd, for a very fine letter.—Rap.

ROBERT D. McNAMARA

Just read March, 1952, issue of OW and was most pleasantly surprised. Lately your story content wasn't as high as it should have been, and I was becoming a little worried about the future of OUR mag. But all such fears disappeared instantly upon reading your latest issue. Your lead novel "Gsrthnxrpqrph" by S. J. Byrne (where in — did he ever think up that name?) was one of the best lead novels you've featured in a long time. Only one fault—in the beginning of the story you built up the visitor from Mars as a benevolent, slightly bewildered fellow from a comic book world, intent only upon furthering trade between our two worlds. Then, out of a clear blue sky, he is transformed into a power-mad dictator who thinks he is governor of Earth, and uses our hero's fiancee for his handmaiden. Despite these discrepancies, though, it was still an excellent story, worthy of re-reading.

"Final Appraisal" by Mack Reynolds was wonderful. And that ending! You must try to get more stories from Mack, he's an excellent writer, and always seems to come up with an ending that shocks you, no matter how logical it is.

"I'm a Stranger Here Myself" by Eric Frank Russell was very good, but it followed a pattern as old as the hills. From beginning to end you knew what would happen. He did pull a little trick, but that also was not a surprise.

The conclusion to "These Are My Children" by Rog Philips was done beautifully. I won't be surprised if this comes out in anthology form before the year is over.

Now for the departments:

"The Man From To-morrow" is good fiction, Ray, but you better label it so before the public starts laughing at you. The "dero" line is no longer popular, and the public wants intelligent, adult fiction, not a hoax. There's some carefully worked out prophecy in that column, and some of it is destined, as it already has, to become truth. So stop trying to fool us and take credit for it.

I was reading Mr. Lowell Howard's letter in your reader's page and notice that he, among others, enjoyed your article "I Flew in a

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Flying Saucer". At the time that article appeared I did not write to tell you my convictions on it, but seeing that so many people have seemed to LIKE it, I shall. This is the type of story which OW should never publish. It was not well done, and followed the pattern of a standard action story. This type of tale, wholly false, but dressed up as only semi-fiction can damage any intelligent solving of the Flying Saucer mystery. I am surprised that you would actually publish such a cheap, sensational opus as this, and then a couple of issues later feature a truly intelligent article on the subject. I'm *amazed*, however, that so many fans seemed to like the former. Well, it's too late to do anything about it now, but please let's not have any more cheap articles of this type in OW.

Your "People Who Make Other Worlds" is an extremely good feature, and should be continued. I'm interested in seeing a spread on Malcolm Smith.

50 Plaza St.
Brooklyn 17, N.Y.

The last thing the public is doing is laughing at the Man From Tomorrow. But what's that about a hoax? Didn't I say I didn't believe it! And haven't a couple of things failed to come true already? But what bothers me is that so much is coming true. How will I explain it if I bat, say, 90 percent correct? Is it possible to GUESS that good? Let's find out, eh? Let's settle this prophecy business for once and for all. Besides, I've got some interesting things to say on this thing—later! They'll really surprise you.—Rap.

L. W. CARPENTER, D. D. S.

For a long time I have labored under the delusion that OW is a top-notch magazine. Indeed I have watched not-a-few milestones in STF pass through the covers of OW.

The thing that really slew my faith in RAP and your mag was that fiasco to end all fiascos; namely *These Are Our Children*, by Rog Phillips. I am not aware of the direction in which Mr. Graham's talents lie (though I am sure he has some), but I am solidly convinced that the aforementioned talents do not include the art of writing and literary composition. Mr. Graham's effort was as trite and hackneyed a bit of drivel as ever it has been my misfortune to find between the covers of any STF magazine. I am not saying this because I do not like Mr. Graham. Indeed, I have not met the gentleman. As far as he is concerned personally, I have no doubt that he is a personable and likeable gentleman. All I have to say is: when he tries to write, he simply doesn't HAVE ANYTHING ON THE BALL!

I might continue by expressing my opinion of RAP, insofar as his policies are concerned. When he was in charge of Z-D, mighty were the mags that were issued under his

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direction! In late months, however, a large slug of FATE has been creeping over into OW. The less said about FATE, the better. What a puerile rag that thing is! It seems that RAP is hot in the pursuit of the so called "Mystical Philosophies", and has become unhealthily obsessed with the thing.

If you are going to make OW a Ziff-Davis mouthpiece, why not go back to N.Y. and take a job reading copy, or just general flunky, and feel at home?

Having been a loyal and faithful reader of science-fiction for eighteen years, I feel that such a long, (though mostly silent) tenure gives me the right to speak. In eighteen years, a reader sees a lot of water go under the bridge.

I have watched you rise from obscurity to one of science-fiction's most outstanding writers and editors. This person has always admired your superb talents and keen mind. It disappoints me greatly, therefore, to read your answer to Mr. Drake in the April issue; and realize that this reflects your official attitude on religion in general, and Christianity in particular. This article constitutes a grave assault upon what belief in The Deity means to most of us.

I only wish that I had time to take this article apart sentence-by-sentence, word-by-word; refute it, and show you how gravely you err in blandly stating: "Belief is at best a rationalization . . . at worst a blind acceptance, etc."

Belief in the perfection, goodness, and benevolence of The Supreme Architect Of The Universe *is none* of the above. Instead, it is the end result of a rational consideration of cause and effect; reason and logic proceeding to its only plausible conclusion. You have never studied the Biological Sciences, Mr. Palmer.

It is in the appraisal of the nature of belief that your thinking goes astray. By accepting this premise as an axiom, the remnant of your philosophy is pyramided upon it as a cornerstone. Your definition of belief is untenable, and the entire structure of your argument is a house built upon sand.

I trust you will avail the readers sufficient space in your magazine to answer you properly. Not necessarily mine; for my command of words leaves much to be desired. Or will you ignore the replies of the fans to your views?

It is too much to expect you to change your views, for I know you will rationalize and defend them to the bitter end. I would like to request that you do not use the pages of your magazine to carry your personal philosophy to young and impressionable readers.

It is one thing to present some esoteric subject like "Shaverism" as truth; it is another to direct an assault upon the religious beliefs of thousands of your loyal fans and readers.

442 East "E" St.

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In Oahspe, their book, they give the history of their visits to earth, visits of their former expeditionary chiefs like Sethantes, Thor, Appollo, Sue, Osire, and many others whose names are now remembered only in legend if at all, as the names Buddha, Brahma, Mahamet and others will become legendary in centuries to come.

In Oahspe these ethereans state quite plainly and simply what they think is good for us in this present age of atomic power and universal travel. First, they state what we should repudiate if we would escape misery. Second, what we should embrace and practice if we would be alive and happy. As one of their members states in Oahspe: "I am not come to captivate the ignorant and unlearned. I come to the wise and learned. And not to one man only but to thousands. That which I am uttering in these words in this place, I am also uttering in the souls of thousands, and I will bring them together."

You will, of course, want to examine, judge, and decide for yourself the validity of Oahspe's extensive statements. Decide for yourself just what and who Oahspe represents. And don't we all want to know who on earth is kidding who and why and how?

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Elizabethton, Tenn.

You surprise us about Roger's story! We liked it, and so did others. But how can we argue against so definite a stand? You certainly have the right to express your opinion, and all we can do is defend you there. But darn it, we kinda liked it . . .

The word "Belief" is defined by Webster. You can look it up. We are too tired to go get our dictionary, but we think it means "acceptance on faith, without proof." When belief is "blind acceptance" (and don't tell us there isn't too darn much of that kind of believing!) then it's just too bad. We were given brains to think with—why not use them? When "belief" is a rationalization, it implies a certain amount of thinking, but "patterned" to suit our own opinion, or our dogmas. What's the matter with knowing? I know there is a Creator...As for ignoring other viewpoints, there you can't accuse me. I stand on my record. OW is a really wide open mag when it comes to both sides of the question; ANY question. I have some young ones too, two girls and a boy; and they will have a chance to get all philosophies—but NONE of them while they are in, as you say, "an impressionable" age. I want those kids to think for themselves, and "belief" is the LAST thing they will do, not the FIRST. Your house may not be built on sand, but on the rock of dogma! I think I prefer the sand . . .

Lastly, you ask for free speech, then ask me to deny myself the same privilege—and on such a flimsy basis as the one that it might give the "impressionable" more than just ONE irrevocable pathway in their future!—Rap.

BOBBY GENE WARNER

I have just finished the best darn editorial I've ever had the good fortune of reading. I'm referring, of course, to your editorial in the April issue of OTHER WORLDS.

Come to think of it, we science-fiction readers are mature in a different sense of the word "maturity". Just what is maturity, anyway? Does it always come at the age of twenty-one. If it does, I have four years until I reach it. But, on the other hand, I've seen a lot of homo sapiens (or homo saps?) who were a good many years over the "Mature" age and still a long way from being mature. Or do you become "mature" when you graduate from a college and two or three universities with an armful of degrees? What actually have you accomplished when you've earned those degrees? You've only had the ideas and principles of others pounded into your skull; actually you haven't done any real original thinking for yourself. Oh, don't take me wrong; I'm not knocking education. It's a mighty darn good thing; we'd be in one heck of a predicament without it. (Or would we, really?) But

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let's assume that we would.

No, neither of the aforementioned are my idea of a mature person. I think real maturity comes when we realize that, for all our intellectual "book larnin'" we're still about the most stupidest creatures in the Universe. When we awaken to that fact, I think we shall begin to learn; in fact, I am certain that many, down through the centuries, have become cognizant of this fact, and profitted by it.

Whenever a person tries to deviate from the common trend of things, that person is usually scoffed at and called quite mentally insane. Perhaps a portion of such persons are mentally ill; but aren't we all, in some fashion or the other? But the major portion of such "crackpots" are actually the mature ones, the free-thinkers who dare step out of line with the ordinary and seek out the shunned things.

Man is more immature than he realizes, otherwise, why would he be sitting on the brink of utter annihilation at this very moment? In a world of maturity is there a place for Iron Curtains, Atom bombs, and general all-around mistrust between major nations of Earth? Man could more fully boast of maturity if he would abandon his plans for self-destruction and turn, for instance, toward space travel. But even in that he is immature, in more than one way. He wants it because it would furnish him an excellent atom bomb launching site if he could set a satellite to revolving around Earth. Even in space travel this obdurate entity Man sees a means of self-destruction.

We science-fictionists, I earnestly believe, could show the good old Earth how to really live . . . if we had the chance. Perhaps we shall have that chance sooner than we think. Then, again, perhaps we shall never have the chance . . .

A science-fiction reader can read a thing and see it from all its aspects; whereas a college professor would probably look at it and say, "That is trash! It couldn't possibly be true; it's not in any of the books I've ever read! I just can't see it." On the other hand, the illiterate person would look at the material and not understand it at all. So, that leaves us in-be-tweens to mull it out. We look at it and say, "It's unbelievable; but by gads it could be true!" And the chances probably are fifty-fifty of its being true.

If you up and told everyone that a space fleet of Martians were coming to Earth to condition us to peace with some unknown rays, so that we would never again seek war, most of the public would tell you flatly that you were buggy. But the science-fiction fan would only look at you, scratch his head while pondering over what you said, and say slowly, "Could be; and I hope to God it is!"

P. O. Box 63,
Bessmay, Texas

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Maybe you're being too hard on us plain humans. God must have known where we'd wind up when he created us. So, if we are stupid, it is because we are immature—but being immature, we'll grow up! Eventually! And maybe we look at the short view—maybe 70 years is too little to learn all we know there is to learn! It seems to me even the murderous sadist will sometime be a "model citizen" admired and loved by all of us who may be murderous sadists, for all we know, given the opportunity and the provocation. Unless some of us can learn by proxy!

—Rap.

DAVE HAMMOND

Okay, Rap, prepare for a tirade. Not that I intend to be nasty or anything like that. It's just that I have a few things to say. And, after all, I *did* have the first letter published in OTHER WORLDS.

You've done a lot since then—some of it good and some poor, but that's just the human being showing through. So down to business:

Your editorial was rather interesting and good egoboo, but I take some exception to it.

"Thus, those who read it (science-fiction) and understand it and make it a living part of their life are the mature minds of which Mr. Overstreet deplores the extreme shortage in our day and age. Science fiction readers are *mature* human beings."

That last sentence gets me. I am a member of what I consider the most mature group of its kind in existence: I'm speaking of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society among whose ranks are artists, authors, fans, college students, high school teachers, engineers, and other people beyond the ridiculous stage. Members, considering the writers only, are L. Sprague de Camp, Alan E. Nourse (who tells me you have recently bought a story from him), Dave Eynon (who writes for Weird Tales, and Harold Lynch (who is celebrating his first sale—a short story—to F&S-F). I might also add that I am the youngest member of the club—although I'll be voting soon!

Well, as I was saying before I became tangential, I think the PSFS is a very mature club and, at the same time, full of life and energy and inanities. A list of recent programs might be of interest; *The Impact of Science on Fiction* (by Tom Clareson who is writing his master's thesis on the subject), *The Lost Race Story* by Ozzie Train—a study and discussion of the Lost Race theme in literature), *Literary Criticisms* (by de Camp—this is a recurring feature: every few months the Lord of Krishna comes up with criticisms and discussions on recent magazines and the entire thing turns into a mad riot), *Screwballs* (by well-known fan Milt Rothman who discussed "screwballs", with mention of Elron's D————s (I don't dare actually

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spell it, because that word that begins with "D" and ends with "s" is a dirty word around the PSFS), the Shaver Mystery, characters who purport to be able to trisect angles and such things), and *How to Write a Science Fiction Story* (a supposedly humorous burlesque on space-opera for which yours truly takes credit—or is it blame?), and a regular feature of the club is the reading of unpublished manuscripts for comment, criticism, and discussion by the club—thus our amateur authors, of which I am one, are helped.

As I said before—the PSFS is mature, but how many other fan clubs have you met that really are? Many of them just go drifting off into discussion of stories of the 1930's or some such nonsense—or end up with beer and wine (well, ours do, too, if the truth must be revealed, but after the meetings).

That's maturity?

Why do people read science fiction in the first place? The entertainment value is the main thing, although most science fiction gives you more than that. And there are some "science fiction" magazines completely lacking in anything mature: you know—the science adventure type and the romances. Yet, are these readers any less science fiction fans?

Well, you can say that they are not if you've got a different definition of "science fiction", but defining "science fiction" is quite a job. And if you try to do so you'll get us both in a semantic tangle that'll mess up the issue properly! So—for the moment assume that our definitions of stf are the same.

Since it doesn't take the kind of person you describe as a fan to read science fiction romances, your definition is wrong. Also, even science fiction fans are people. "To err is human". I know many science fiction fans that I am very indifferent to—and yet they may be as well read as any. Of course, that may be a matter of personal opinion.

In reference to the Shaver Mystery you say ". . . the science fiction fan applied *reason.*" Do you call it reason when a large group of fans attempted to have Amazing banned from the stands and all that stuff when the reasonable thing would have been, if they didn't like the Mystery, to merely stop buying it. A lot of stupid controversy was thrown around by what you call "reasoning" people over the Mystery.

Yet at the same time I'm not in complete disagreement with you—just a matter of qualification, that's all. One thing more about this: have you noticed how many mature people read Pogo? Sometimes I jestingly use that fact as a criterion of maturity!

I've read the Shaver Mystery and I'm rather neutral on the subject—the only thing I really KNOW about it is that there were some very fine stories in the series. In fact, I pur-

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chased today the issue of Amazing containing *Cult of the Witch Queen* which I'm going to start reading as soon as I finish this letter.

It is my own personal opinion that stories like *Act of God* and such, dealing with religion, should not be in your magazine. That is not because I'm being prejudiced—religion is a subject that has always fascinated me—I, who do not actively follow any religion; neither do I condemn—but I feel that the authors you used depended more on their subject matter for interest rather than their writing. As a reader, as a would-be writer, I'm concerned with entertainment values and the styles of writing. I don't think that of the authors who have decked your pages any one of them is really competent to handle the tremendous question of religion. And the authors who really could—they don't seem to be interested.

And I think it's about time you stopped spouting Shaver Mystery all over the place. I read a magazine of fiction primarily for entertainment—if you're going to cloud the entertainment with preaching and—I hate to say this—ranting then you can't expect readers to keep reading.

So I've had my say.

806 Oak Street
Runnemede, N. J.

Right you are, a lot of times! As for the people you describe being mature, I say yes. Do you have to be a pedant to be mature? You can not enjoy a glass of beer and be mature? As for the result of the reasoning used over the Shaver Mystery, does that preclude the reasoning that led to it? Any mental action pro and con must use reason, therefore the fans who wanted to ban the Shaver mystery were reasoning people. We admire them, and those who don't agree with them, after reasoning it out, we also admire. It's the guy who refuses to discuss the subject we think is immature. And why do you think religion is for the "really competent to handle the tremendous question"? Religion is for the little guy, not the superman. For plain people. To lift their eyes to the fact they are more than animals. To make them strive to advance. Some of them don't need to be shoved, is all. And when you limit ANY subject to the "competent" you are enacting the exclusion act to end all exclusions. Besides, name me one authority on religion (if you are speaking of realization of a Deity and not a Sect)? For my money he's the guy who can glory in the sunset, delight in the song of a bird. As for spouting Shaver Mystery, we don't! It's you readers keep bringing it up! Please—we'll put out a book! But in OW, it's stories—and we hope you like them!

—Rap.

THE END

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PERSONALS

Any fen in the Baltimore area interested in joining a new fan club which publishes its own fanzine and has its own library contact Dick Clarkson, 410 Kensington Rd., Baltimore 29, Md. (Wilkens 0001) . . . *Would like to contact fans in Lansing, Cadillac and Traverse City, Mich. Douglas C. Hempstreet, 818 D Chestnut Rd, East Lansing, Mich. (Tel. 8-6365)* . . . Phyllis Hollins, 209 Forrest Avenue, Redford, Va. would like to correspond with anyone who shares her dislike for S. Fowler Wright . . . *Wanted: aSF, Nov '48 & Mar '49; MSF, May '50 & Feb '51; OW, Jan '51; Galaxy, Oct & Nov '50. Benny Sodek, 1415 S. Marsalis, Dallas, Tex* . . . Have '33 thru '40 Blue Book; '32 thru '40 Adventure; '32 thru '34 Argosy. Condition fair to excellent. Will trade for pre '51 Madge, aSF, OW or Galaxy. Also stf or f-stf novels, what have you? Dick Anderson, 4552-51 Ave. N E, Seattle 5, Wash . . . *Would like to organize a fan club in Oxnard. Small group already started, anyone interested write Ron Smith, 332 B Date Street, Oxnard, Calif* . . . Trade: aSF, Sept & Nov '51; Madge, Jan '52; OW, Jan & March '52; Galaxy, July, Aug, Sept, Oct, Nov, & Dec '51, Jan & Feb '52; Galaxy Novels 6, 7, & 8; PBs "What Mad Universe", "Donovan's Brain", "Martian Chronicles". Will trade for back issues of AS, FFM, FN, TWS, SS, '50 & '51 Wonder Story Annual and FSM. Henry Pasniewski, 35 E. 11 St, Bayonne, N. J. . . . *Wanted: Comic books: Tarzan comics #1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24 & 27; Strange Worlds #1, 3, 4 & 5; Planet Comics, all issues; All Star Comics #1 thru 4 and Batman Comics #1, 2, 3. Magazines: Jungle Stories, all issues; Comet, all issues except Vol 1 #3 Mar '41; Golden Fleece, all issues. Books: Burroughs' books "The Tarzan Twins", "Back to the Stone Age," "Land of Terror"; all issues of "The Burroughs Bulletin". Would like to correspond with Burroughs Fans. Paul Mittelbuscher, Rt 2, Sweet Springs, Mo* . . . Wanted: issues of AS containing "Empire of Jegga", "I Remember Lemuria", "Return of Sathanas", All-Shaver issue, any issues before Vol 20 #5; FA containing "Whispering Gorilla", "When Free Men Shall Stand", "To Watch By Night", "Toka Fights the Man Bats", "Toka Fights the Big Cats"; OW #1, 2, 8 & 10; SS containing "Dark World", "Lord of the Storm", "Lands of the Earthquake"; any Madge prior to the issue containing "Hell's Angel." Roy Dixon, Box 175, Montgomery, Ohio . . . *Wanted: Ace Mystery, Dime Mystery, Eerie Mysteries, Eerie Stories, Horror Stories, Mystery Ad-*

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ventures, Mystery Novels and Short Stories, Mystery Novels, Mystery Tales, Real Mystery Magazine, Sinister Stories, Spicy Mystery, Startling Mystery, Strange Detective Mysteries, Terror Tales, Thrilling Mystery, Uncanny Tales (U.S.)—'32 to '41 copies only. Need the above mags, or information about them, for a revised edition of MACABRE INDEX. Will buy or trade. First edition of MACABRE INDEX, 25c. Wm. N. Austin, 3317 W 67th St, Seattle, 7, Wash . . . AD-O-Zine: for low cost ads with big returns. Sample copy 10c, cash or stamps. Sub. 6/50c. Full page ad, 4x6, only 50c; ½ page, 25c. Write W. C. Butts, 2058 E Atlantic St, Philadelphia 34, Pa . . . *We get dozens of Sat Eve Post, Colliers, etc. here at camp and they're very welcome, but we wonder if anyone would care to donate stf, western, detective or model railroad books and mags to us. Sgt. C W DeLeuze, ER 33398634, Co. "C" 8080 A U, APO 1051, c/o Postmaster, San Francisco, Calif . . .* Will any San Francisco fans interested in joining a combination stf and Rocket Club please phone JU 7-4431. We design, build and test rockets; have a large stf library. Mike Walker, 194 Phealen Ave, San Francisco, Calif . . . *Eldon K. Everett, P.O. Box 513, Tacoma, Wash. wants Tarzan comic strips; Pogo; Shadow official holster set, club button, cloak & hat and rubber stamp; Spider club ring and mechanical pencil; orig Shadow illos and covers; movie stills and radio scripts; pre Dec. '43 copies of The Shadow; mags and big little books with Tarzan stories. Send for itemized list. Will trade or buy. Send want list . . .* Walter Coslet wants issues of Thrill Book, Weird Tales, Mind Magic, My Self, Doctor Death, Terence X. O'Leary's War Birds, Oriental Stories, Magic Carpet, Uncanny Tales, Unknown, Blue Book, Munsey, Argosy, Cavalier, All-Story, Popular Magazine and The Golden Book; Canadian issues of Astonishing Stories, Eerie Tales, Super-Science Stories, Uncanny Tales, Weird Tales; British issues of Tales of the Uncanny, Yankee Science Fiction, Yankee Weird Shorts. Send for itemized list. Will buy or will trade from large stock of mags including WT from 1924, AS from #1, Argosy from 1903-05 and much later material. Walter A. Coslet, Box 6, Helena, Mont . . . *For sale or trade: The American Gun Club, 1st Br ed, 1874, (From The Earth To The Moon), Jules Verne; The Dream, H. G. Wells; The Food Of The Gods, H. G. Wells; The Undying Fire, H. G. Wells; Who Knocks, Derleth anthology; PBs The Man Who Sold The Moon, PB of Stf*

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(1934), *An Earth Man On Venus, Out Of This World, What Mad Universe, Avon Fantasy Reader #4, The Big Eye, Ship Of Ishtar, Burn Witch Burn, Moon Pool, Metal Monster, Fight For Life; also Avon Ghost Reader with Derleth, Bram Stoker, Lovecraft, Merritt and others. Maurice Lubin, 125 Sherman St, Portland, Maine* . . . New stf club "The Curious Ones" wants members. Contact Vic Waldrop, Jr., 212 West Avenue, Cartersville, Ga. Vic also wants Galaxy 1, 2 & 3 . . . *Wanted, preferably from Canadian fans: PS, Summer '49 & May '51; TCS-AB #1; SS, Mar & Nov '48, Jan & July '49; TWS, Apr, Oct & Dec '48, Feb & Aug '49; Merritt's Moon Pool and Snake Mother in PB or FN; any issues of vol 1 or 2 of F&SF except Dec '51; any vol 1 of Galaxy; aSF, Oct '51. Barry Nelson, 3985 Dundas St, Vancouver, B.C., Canada* . . . Have over 100 stf mags for sale incl. AS, OW, FA, PS, SS, aSF, Galaxy, Imagination, Future, TWS, etc. Send stamped self-addressed envelope for itemized price list. Ben Linder, 726 W. Norris St, Phila 22, Pa . . . *Wanted to trade: A hard-cover copy of Bradbury's Martian Chronicles for a copy of The Incredible Planet in virtually any condition. Arlene Ossi, 1370 Van Houten Ave, Clifton, N. J.* . . . Wanted: any AS, especially '50 & '51 and 25 year annish; Dec '51 and Mar '52 OW. Am planning a fan club directory; just send 10c in coin or stamps or an issue of your fanzine for a copy of the directory Barclay Johnson, 878 Oak Street, Winnetka, Illinois . . . *Buddy Johnson, Rt 5, Box 170, El Dorado, Ark. wants any issue of Captain Future between Vol 2 #3 and Vol 6 #2* . . . For sale or trade: Burroughs' The War Chief, Jungle Tales of Tarzan, Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle; paper backed books: Wellman's "Sojarr of Titan," Belbenoit's "I Escaped From Devil's Island," and Coblentz's "Into Plutonian Depths." Also, aSF from Aug '41; Worlds Beyond from Dec '50; Avon S-F Reader #2 (mint) and #1 (no cover); AS, Dec '40 and Mar, Apr & Aug '51; FA, Dec '50. Mar & June '51; PS, Mar, July & Sept '51; Super Science, Mar '50 & Apr '51; Future, Mar & July' 51; SF Quarterly, May '51. Bid for any or all. Lonny Lunde, 306 Elmore, Park Ridge, Ill . . . *Rosco Wright is bringing out a stf art mag for commercial and fine arts (printed) and needs material. 146 E. 12th, Eugene, Oregon* . . . I need issues of the Canadian edition of Uncanny Tales and April '43 Super Science Stories (Canadian) in good to-mint condition; Argosy '32 and prior at reasonable rates; WT '46 and back, US edition only; Blue Book, Colliers, Esquire, Sat Eve Post and info as to stories in these and other off-trail mags. Doug Mitchell, Ste 11-406, Notre Dame Ave, Winnipeg, Man., Canada . . . *Would like to buy first four issues of FATE; preferably in lot, but will buy separately. Ronald L.*

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Smith, 332 E. Date St, Oxnard, Calif . . . For sale: ERB's Girl from Hollywood, At the Earth's Core, Bandit of Hell's Bend, Moon Maid, Mad King, Pellucidar, Cave Girl, Tarzan Twins, and many more; write for complete list. Would also like to correspond with Burroughs fans. J. Miller, 749 Merchants Rd, Rochester, N. Y. *Will trade following mags for aSF, May '49 to Jan '50 or pre '48: TWS Aug, Oct & Dec '49, Apr, June, Aug & Oct '50, Feb, Apr & Oct '51; SS May & Nov '49, Jan, Mar, July, Sept & Nov '51; Jan, Mar, & Nov '51; PS Fall '49, Spr, Sum, Fall & Nov '50, Jan, May & July '51; AS Mar, Apr, May & Dec '49, Apr thru Nov '50, Oct '51, also ASQ '48, vol 22 #10, 11 & 12 and ASQ '49, vol 23 #6, 7 & 8; FA Apr, June & Aug '49, Sept, Oct, & Nov '50, Jan '51; FSQ Spr, Sum & Fall '50; Future vol 1 #1, 2, 3 & 5; Su Sci July '49, Jan, July & Sept '50; Fant Nov & Mar '49; TCS-AB #3; WSA Vol 1 #1. Bill Fischer Jr, 7611 S. Green St, Chicago 20, Ill* . . . Wanted: 1st ed E. R. Burroughs Inc copies of: "Tarzan and the Forbidden City", "Tarzan and the Foreign Legion", "Tarzan the Magnificent", "Apache Devil", "The Lad and the Lion". Would like to hear from any ERB fans and from anyone having a complete listing of his books and mag stories. John F. Cook, 21 Hawthorne Rd, Bradford, Pa . . . *Richard Field, 2263 Commonwealth Ave, St Paul 8, Minn will pay 15c each for copies of Walt Disney's Comics and Stories prior to '49. Will pay $15 for a complete collection of Walt Disney Comics and Stories from Jan '44 thru Dec '49 in excellent condition* . . . Send 6 or 8 stf mags or PBs and 25c. I will send you an equal number, all different. Will send 3 uncovered mags for 2 with covers of desired. Also, send want list and list of trading material. John Quagliano, 1753 E 26th St, Brooklyn 29, NY . . . *Wanted: WT, May, Aug, Oct & Dec '34, Mar & July '35. For sale: "Maker of Moons", R. W. Chambers, 1st ed, exc cond, $5.00; "The King in Yellow", R. W. Chambers, 1895 ed, good cond, $3.50; 2 leather bound books "A Dreamer's Tales" and "Book of Wonder" by Dunsany, fine cond, $3 for the set. Mrs. Bethel Heller, 13541½ Tolton Ave, Corona, Calif* . . . Limited edition of "The Immortal Storm", Sam Moskowitz's history of fandom. 180 mimeo pages, $2 postpaid while they last. Henry W. Burwell, Jr., 459 Sterling St, N.E., Atlanta, Ga . . .

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The People Who Make OTHER WORLDS

No. 5 The Art Director

Malcolm Smith was born in Memphis, Tennessee some forty years ago. Almost at once he demonstrated that he was going to be an artist, by drawing flowers at the age of five, when he started school. His actual start in science fiction was with "Tarrano, The Conqueror" in *Science & Invention,* and with "The Master of Mystery", an old Houdini serial in the early twenties. He still has the first volume of *Amazing Stories,* which he bound himself.

He arrived in Chicago in the middle of the depression and went to the American Academy. He had decided to be a display artist, but found that it paid little, so he became an illustrator. In 1940, as was inevitable, he did a few covers based on his science fiction love, AS, and submitted them to Ray Palmer. Ray took one look, bought the covers. Art Director Herman Bellin took another look and began buying more. Then, when Ziff-Davis expanded its art department, Malcolm became a member of the regular art staff. From this beginning he rapidly worked himself up to Art Director of the Pulp Division, and for several years dictated the art policy of its six magazines, and among the covers that appeared on them were many of his own.

In 1948 he left Ziff-Davis to set up his own art studio, and then joined Bendelow and Associates, a group of commercial artists who

pooled their efforts and occupied a huge cooperative studio, at which stand Malcolm still operates.

Most of his paintings are painted from models he poses himself and there are many who claim his camera is an alibi for the presence for the lovely models in his studio. However, it is from this that he developed the new (for science fiction) technique of color-dyed photo prints for covers, such as appears on the front cover of the September issue of OTHER WORLDS.

At present he is Art Director of OTHER WORLDS and FATE magazine, and lives in his own home in Des Plaines, Illinois. He is married and has two sons, who share one dog.

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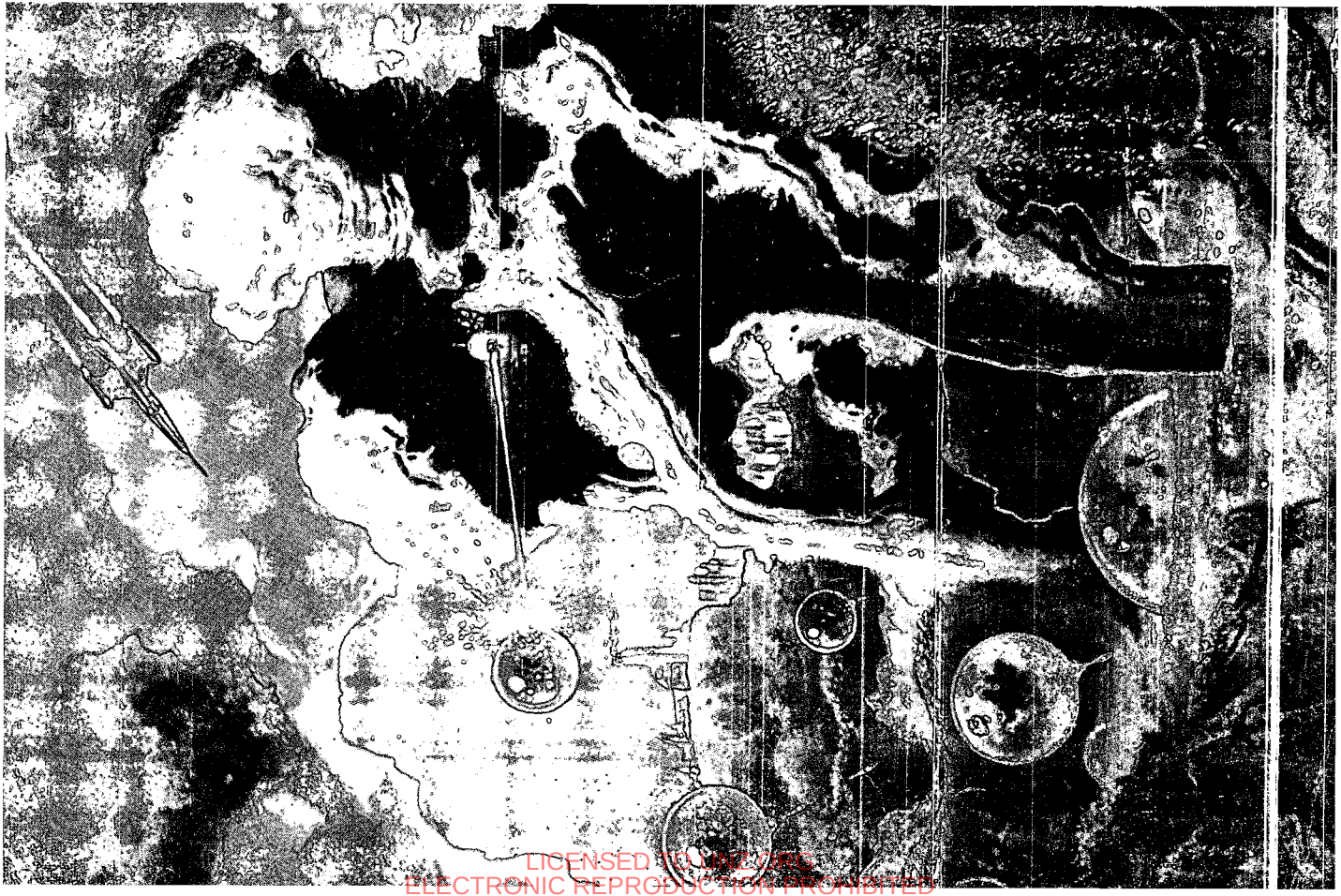

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